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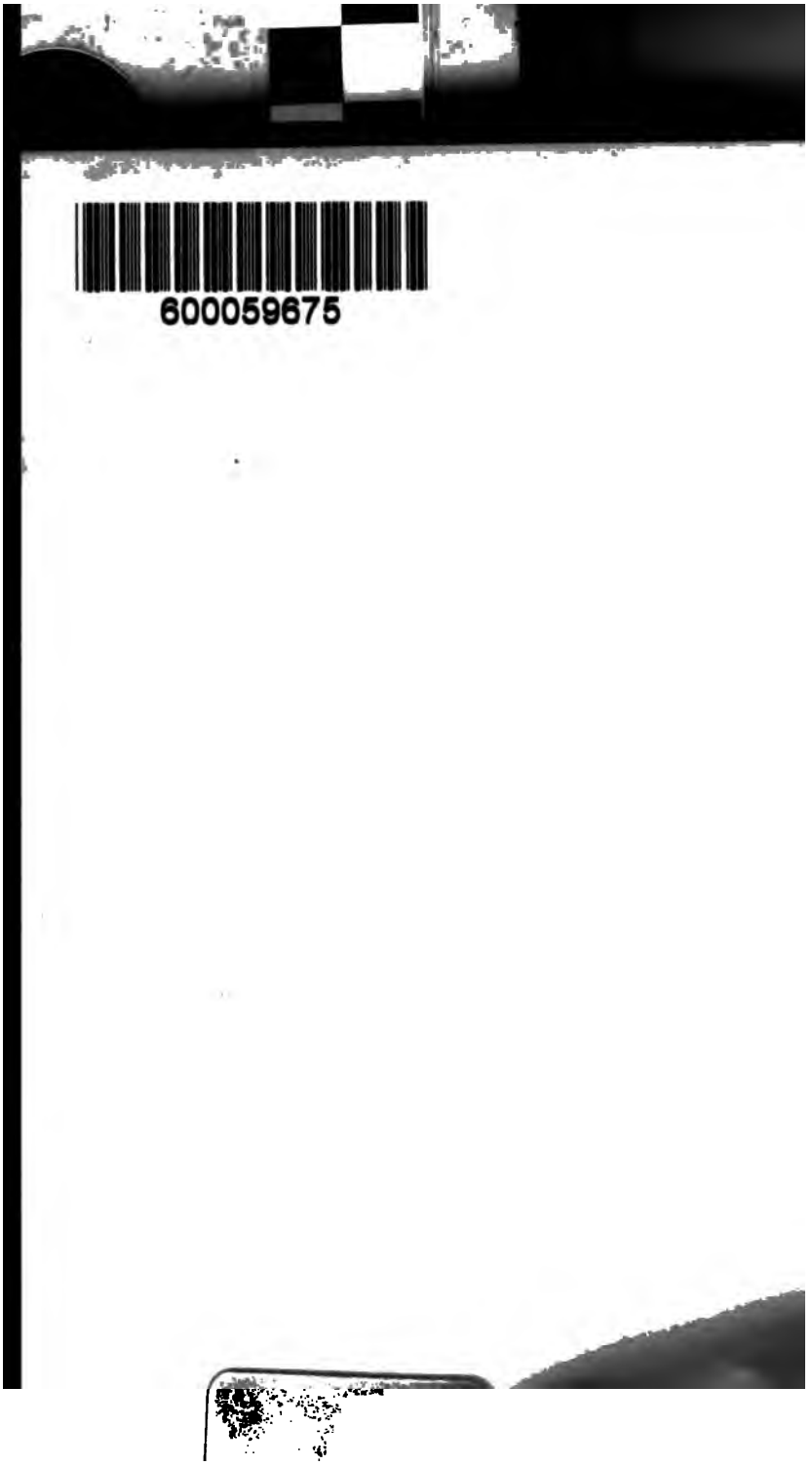
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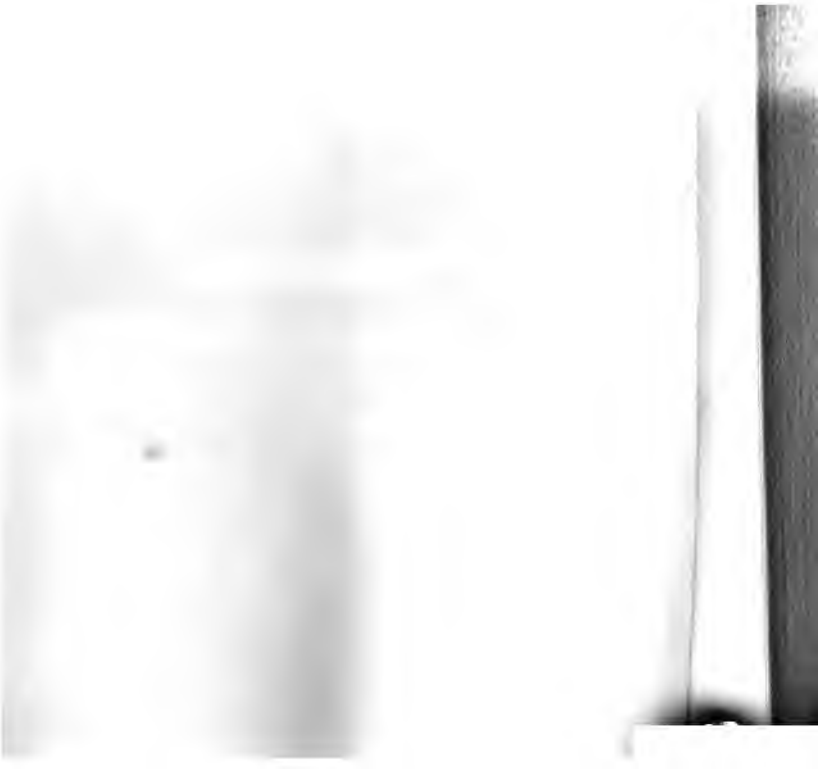

MAY AND DECEMBER.

A TALE OF WEDDED LIFE.

BY MRS. HUBBACK,

AUTHOR OF

"THE WIFE'S SISTER; OR, THE FORBIDDEN MARRIAGE,"

&c., &c.

" Readers, the tale that I relate,
This lesson seems to carry,
Choose not alone a proper mate,
But proper time to marry."

COWPER.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:

CHARLES J. SKEET, PUBLISHER,

10, KING WILLIAM STREET,

CHARING CROSS.

1854.

24g. v. 613.

LONDON:
Printed by Schulze and Co., 13. Poland Street.

MAY AND DECEMBER.

CHAPTER I.

Hear a little further,
And then I'll bring thee to the present business
Which now's upon us; without the which this story
Were most impertinent.

SHAKESPEARE.

Business was over for the day, and the numerous clerks of Mr. Cameron's establishment were preparing to leave the office. They stretched and yawned as they rose from their several desks, as those do who throw off by an effort the fatigue of long application, or the weariness of oppressive thoughts. There was

a little buzz of conversation going on, and jokes and occasional laughter, although the presence of the principal clerk usually repressed such exhibitions of hilarity.

"You must come to us to-morrow night, Dunsford," said an elderly man, to a junior, who had all day been working by his side, "it is Grace's birthday, and we are going to be very gay, and keep her coming of age with great festivity. You will join us, I know."

"Gladly, Sir, since you are so kind; and if Miss Ashton wishes it too," replied the handsome young man he addressed, colouring with pleasure, or some other feeling, as he spoke the last words.

"I wish you would ask me too, Ashton," said a voice close behind them, which made them both start, and turn round.

It was Mr. Cameron himself, who having entered the office to speak to his head clerk, had caught the sound of the invitation.

Ashton professed, with a mixture of pride and gratitude, how much he should be flattered if Mr. Cameron would honour his little party with his presence. He was sure it would be welcome news to Grace.

"No, don't tell her," replied the merchant; "I shall come and take her by surprise, to see what sort of a housekeeper she contrives to make; I've a notion that she is a good girl, and manages very well in that way; and some day she will make somebody very happy as a wife."

There was nothing very extraordinary in such a remark; it was true, but common-place, and the less surprising as Mr. Cameron was godfather to Grace Ashton, and had always taken a good deal of notice of her; yet these few words made the two individuals who overheard them very uncomfortable.

One of these was Harry Dunsford himself; he was to be sure very much in love with the object of Mr. Cameron's eulogium, and lovers have a prescriptive right to torment themselves about trifles, and indulge in gratuitous and supernumerary fears. It would, indeed, be a very comfortable thing for the rest of the world if these individuals were the only ones who subjected themselves to such wilful tortures; and, as these torments are supposed to form half the delight of love, it would be a pity if lovers should not be able to have their share;

whilst, in all other cases, similar mistrusts produce an unnecessary but positive amount of unhappiness.

What it was that annoyed Harry would be difficult exactly to define; a mixture of jealousy and mortification, a fear lest the merchant's praise should so far enhance the father's opinion of the daughter's value, as to make him seek a higher match; and a suspicion that Mr. Cameron himself would not be pleased with his pretensions, when they became known; these were the most obvious and rational of his feelings. It was no recent passion on his part, this affection for Grace Ashton; he had fallen in love with her ten years ago, when he first came up to London.

Harry was an orphan; and the uncle who had superintended his education, that is to say, had chosen his school, and managed his little fortune, had never afforded him a congenial home in his house. At fifteen, he had been placed in Mr. Cameron's counting-house, and left to shift for himself in this situation, forlorn and dangerous as such a life must be to the young and inexperienced, without a friend to speak to, or a home to receive them in ther

leisure hours. But Harry was of a cheerful temper, and of steady principles; somehow, in his early troubles, he had acquired a degree of firmness, self-reliance, and hopefulness which supported him wonderfully; and he soon won the affections of Mr. Ashton, who first pitied, then admired, and finally loved the boy; they were engaged in the same department, and Harry was ere long invited to make Ashton's house his home, if he pleased; and he was able once more to enjoy domestic pleasures, and a family circle, such as his memory still presented to him as his, before the terrible fever had carried off his parents and his two little sisters.

Of course he had fallen in love with Grace Ashton; he had called her his sister, and she had allowed him to treat her as such for some years, but gradually these things changed; Grace grew into a woman, and a degree of embarrassment, of consciousness, of painful pleasure, and of pleasing pain mixed with their intercourse, and silently superseded the old frank and fraternal manners which had been so natural.

Harry's lodgings were not very far from Mr. Ashton's house, and thither they took their way

together, on quitting the counting-house, both silent and pre-occupied; the younger, of course, by his love-affairs, the elder less sentimentally engrossed by certain foreign correspondence.

Leaving them on their way home, I shall return to the counting-house, from the door of which was slowly issuing a man of striking appearance, good-looking, or perhaps actually handsome, except for a downcast look in his black eyes, and a sinister curl to the corners of his mouth, which gave a passing expression of subtilty to his features, almost repulsive. This was James Wildey, the confidential clerk, and friend of the wealthy merchant. He, too, was meditating on the praise of Grace Ashton which had reached his ears. To him it was as unwelcome as to Harry Dunsford, though for very different reasons. He was no rival to the young man, and yet to him, too, the idea occurred, ridiculous as it seemed, that the merchant was thinking of Grace as a wife for himself. Mr. Cameron was nearly sixty, and Grace Ashton only twenty-one; Mr. Cameron had been a widower about eight months, and had never indicated in any way, either by word or deed, the slightest intention of marrying again;

and yet his manner of speaking of Grace filled Wildey's mind with almost as much of jealous fear as it did the young lover himself.

The fact was, Wildey had dreams of his own, plans for his own advancement, built up on the recent widowhood of the merchant, plans which were to make his own fortune with rapidity, and to place him in a situation which, with regard to influence, would be equal, if not superior, to that of Mr. Cameron.

As he walked slowly down to his small house, where his sister superintended his domestic arrangements, he was reviewing these schemes, and his thoughts were to this effect:

"What a stupid thing it is of my sister to be so plain and silly! With half my good looks," and here he glanced at a large shop-window, which reflected back his person and features, "with half my good looks, and only a quarter of my sense, she might have been sure of the prize; I have given her opportunity enough, I am sure, but it is all to no purpose—she never will be Mrs. Cameron: so provoking! and I am certain a little flattery, a little adroit sympathy, would soon bring him into any one's power. I wish I knew what

sort of girl May Luttrell is—whether she is clever and good-looking; she ought to be, if she takes after her mother's family at all—but one cannot tell. However, nothing venture, nothing have; I will hazard the invitation, and it's odds but I can turn it to some good account or other. Ann shall write to her by to-morrow's post, and I will have her in London on this speculation. I suppose I can manage any young country-girl, and when I am quite sure of the turn of her mind, I will see about making up this match. If I do not make myself master of old Cameron's influence, and partner of his wealth, my name is not James Wildey, and I'm an idiot — that's all!"

The ensuing morning, Grace Ashton was quite surprised and puzzled that her father should evince such extraordinary anxiety relative to their little party in the evening. In general, he troubled himself slightly about such things, trusting everything to her discretion. She never remembered his stopping over his muffin and coffee to express his desire that Jane's frock should set tidily on the shoulders, and her hair be nicely smoothed; that Robert

should be steady, and not play any tricks; that George and Julia should not meddle with the supper beforehand, or eat too much of it when they sat down at last; and, especially, that little Sarah should not cry when spoken to, or run and bury her head under the sofa-pillows.

Grace promised to do her best on the occasion; suggested that they were usually tolerably discreet when they had company; and, after a moment's consideration, added, that if he was particular, perhaps Sarah had better be put to bed first, as she was shy, and might be frightened. To this proposal, however, her father would not consent, to the great joy of Grace, who dearly loved her little sisters, and would not have deprived them of any pleasure on her own account for the world.

So she cheerfully undertook that all should go well; and helping her father to brush his coat and hat, and giving him the farewell kiss, she saw him depart, and herself returned to her household duties.

But whilst superintending the small details of their projected feast, assisting in the confectionery, or overlooking the preparations for her sister's toilette, she could not keep her

mind from wandering to the subject, and trying to guess why her father attached such unusual importance to these little concerns.

Whose opinion *she* most valued, and in whose eyes *she* most wished to looked well, she knew beyond all question; there was but one of the expected guests, to tell the truth, of whose taste she thought very highly; but she did not quite suppose that her father was so desirous of pleasing him, or indeed was likely to think of him at all.

"Gracey, dear," cried her eldest brother, running into the room where she was busy, "what's all this fuss about; what have you been saying to my father to make him come and lecture me about behaviour. You need not trouble yourself, I can tell you, if it's Harry Dunsford you are thinking of: I am not going to do him any harm. But I say, I don't like to be lectured, and if you do so again, I will either do or say something about—eh, Grace?"

"I've not been saying anything about you, Bob; my father has been talking to me in the same way. He is a little particular, but I do not know why; only I am sure you will try to

please him. And don't get nonsensical ideas in your head." She paused, colouring.

"Nonsensical ideas! I deny the imputation: my head concentrates two-thirds of the sense of the family, Miss Grace. I should like you to convict me of a nonsensical idea, that's all. Is it one to think that Harry Dunsford is glad to come here this evening?"

"Yes, very, Bob, because you know he can come when he likes."

"Oh, very well, I shall tell him you say his coming here is a nonsensical idea—see if I don't. And in my humble opinion, your liking him so much is a very nonsensical idea. Do you suppose he cares for you?"

"I don't suppose anything about it; and I do not see why you should say I like him so much: I am sure I never said so."

"No, no; girls always make a monstrous mystery about their likings and dislikings—they are never open and candid. Now I declare, Harry is a regular brick, but I dare say you would be ashamed to agree with me."

"I certainly should not apply such an epithet to one who is no more like a brick than a stone, Bob. Perhaps you could define in what

respect he resembles a solid lump of burnt clay?"

"Call it parallelopipedon, Grace; that's its scientific term. I like to hear things called by their right names."

"Oh, very well, a young man is a brick; a brick is a parallelopipedon. Is that right now, Bob?"

He laughed and nodded.

"Now, Bob, it's time you were off," added Grace, looking at the clock.

"Ah! that office, Grace! It's desperate hard work, day after day. Don't I wish I was Mr. Cameron now, with my fortune ready made. Why they say he is worth a couple of plums at least. How I should like it!"

"But, Bob, would you like to be sixty, a plain elderly widower, without children, or any one to care for you. Would you give up all your hopes of being a handsome young man some day, and all the advantages of your lessons in the polka?"

"Ay, that's a consideration, my most sagacious sister; but then Mr. Cameron may marry again. I suppose *you* would not object to be his wife, eh, Grace?"

"Oh, no, of course; you can tell him I shall be proud and happy," said she, laughing, and gently pushing him to the door.

"And you are so old too, Grace," pursued he, "so very old—twenty-one to-day—that is so nearly sixty—quite on a level: a most suitable match. How well it will look in the papers! We will get Harry Dunsford to draw out the paragraph."

"There—go, go!"

"It shall run like this: 'After a short but severe courtship'—there would not be time for a long one—'the wealthy and deeply-in-love Mr. Cameron, to the beautiful and sweetly-affectionate Miss Ashton.' For really I don't see why people should not let the world know how fond they are of one another when they marry as when they die, do you?"

He ran off, laughing at his own idea, and left Grace to finish her business in peace.

The day passed quickly enough to Grace Ashton, and the hour arrived for the respective visitors. The candles were lighted, the drawing-room decked in company aspect, the sisters all dressed, and everything promising well for the evening. Mr. Ashton lived in one

of those large, old-fashioned, but comfortable houses in the neighbourhood of Queen Square —houses built for the nobility, but which the changes of fashion, and the migration of the rich westward have now sentenced to shelter less opulent tenants. In the large and handsome, though old-fashioned drawing-room, the cheerful party was assembled, and the first token which the knocker sent through the house of approaching guests was familiar to all the family.

"There's Harry!" was the exclamation of all except Grace herself, for he was a very great favourite with the junior members of the family, and he had not been five minutes in the room, before Sarah was on his knee, George whispering into one ear, and Julia confiding important secrets on the other side. He sat a little behind, his attention claimed by the three little ones hanging round him, but his eyes following Grace as she moved about, and gave a smiling welcome to her quickly-arriving visitors. These were mostly young people of all ages between twelve and twenty-five, and when all assembled, they formed a merry group, with plenty of smiles and good-humour, and a very fair sprinkling of beauty among them.

Dancing, of course, was to be the pursuit of the evening—the only occupation which could afford content and amusement to such a party; and Grace, seating herself at the piano, began a fascinating polka, which soon set eight or ten young couples in rapid motion, and produced unmingled satisfaction to all except Harry Dunsford, who would have been shocked at finding pleasure in dancing with any one but the fair musician herself, and looked on himself as a perfect martyr to friendship, when he allowed Jane to introduce him to another partner. Nor was his satisfaction much increased when five minutes after, Grace was relieved from her self-imposed task by the good-natured intervention of a kind middle-aged lady, who, volunteering her services at the instrument, allowed Grace herself to join the dancers, which she did, taking for a partner a little girl, who was sitting disengaged in a corner.

She and Harry came pretty near together in the pauses incidental to a prolonged polka, and Grace could not help observing that his partner seemed determined to make herself agreeable to Mr. Dunsford, and, judging from her smiles and liveliness, found no drawback in him. Now,

though Grace was one of the most good-natured girls in the world, and in general was as ready to please a little girl as a young man, and desirous that all her guests should be happy in their own way, I do not mean to assert that she possessed such sublime philosophy as to enjoy dancing with little Janet Feltham quite as much as she would have done having Harry for a partner; nor with all her generous unselfishness could she be desirous that he should find Miss Maria Bookham quite as agreeable as herself. Conscious of these feelings, and half-fearful of betraying them, the next time they paused, she took care that it should be at a considerable distance from the corner where Harry and the young lady were smiling and whispering; and her firm resolution not to watch them was suddenly assisted by the interruption which her thoughts received from another quarter.

A tap on the shoulder made her turn round, expecting to see her father behind her, and she was a little startled on discovering, instead of him, Mr. Cameron, whom she had not in the least anticipated. She was, however, very glad to see him, and it instantly occurred to her that

it was on his account her father had been so precise in his directions as to order and propriety, a simple and natural reason for his conduct, which at once destroyed sundry vague and fanciful solutions which had been floating in her mind since the morning.

"So, my little Grace," said the merchant, "this is the way in which I find you employed. I understood from your father you were come to years of discretion, and intended to be perfectly sober and steady from this time forth, and here I find you whirling away like a water-wheel, at a pace which would rival an express train. I wonder how such delicate creatures, who look no stronger than their white muslin gowns, can stand the wear and tear of such tremendous exertion."

"Did you never dance, formerly, Sir?" said Grace, smiling.

"Saucy girl, you mean to remind me that I am too old to be a judge of such matters."

"Oh, no, indeed, dear Sir, but I dare say you liked dancing once as well as we do."

"I tell you what Grace, when I was a young man, I should have been much too gallant to leave a pretty young woman like you without a

partner. What! have none of these young men eyes in their heads or taste in their hearts, that you should be obliged to stand up with a little girl like that!"

"Oh, Janet and I do very well together, Sir," replied Grace.

"That we do!" cried little Janet, who was not yet old enough for vanity to supersede affection. "Gracey is so kind and good-natured; my brother wanted to take her from me, but she would not change."

"And if I were as young as your brother, I should propose an exchange again," replied the merchant, "but I know nothing of your modern polkas and waltzes. So, as I cannot offer you my hand, Grace, just lend me yours for a moment, to put this round it instead," and he held out as he spoke a very elegant gold bracelet. "Let me clasp it round your pretty arm, my dear," continued he, as she extended her hand towards him with a warm expression of thanks for his kindness, and admiration of his gift.

He tried to fasten it, but ineffectually, bungling over the snap in his attempts, until he let it drop through his fingers. Janet picked it up, and restored it to him.

"Confound these new-fangled clasps, there is no understanding these gew-gaws!" exclaimed the merchant impatiently; "do it yourself, little one, and let us see how it looks on Grace's arm."

"Beautiful!" said little Janet, as she obeyed him, "oh, Grace, what a lucky girl you are!"

"Yes," said Grace, as she respectfully and affectionately put Mr. Cameron's hand to her lips, "I am lucky in having so kind a friend as my godfather to remember me. It is very good of you, Sir."

"Not a bit, not a bit," said he, "your father has served me faithfully longer than you have lived, my child, and I trust you may prove yourself a worthy daughter of so good a father. That is the best wish I can make for you."

"Thank you most heartily, Sir, for those kind words," replied she, with glistening eyes. "As a token of esteem for my father, your present is indeed valuable."

"And Grace, my dear, remember one thing: if ever you have a favour to ask of me, just show me the bracelet, and I pledge myself to do anything in my power for your advantage. So there, now you may go on dancing again."

There was one standing near at this moment, who overheard every word that passed, and whose dark brow grew darker as he did so. James Wildey had accepted an invitation to this party, when he learned that Mr. Cameron was to be there also, and he now was watching intently the effect produced on Grace by the merchant's kindness. A very slight acquaintance with her would have convinced him of the absurdity of his suspicions, but she had hitherto never attracted his attention in the smallest degree; his sister knew her, it was true, but Ann Wildey had not much more discernment than the chair she sat on, and to ask her what was Grace's character, or what was likely to be her conduct, would, he knew, be perfectly useless. Since, however, it had become an object of importance to understand her thoughts and wishes, he resolved to exert himself at once for that purpose; and accordingly, he seized the very first opportunity of asking her to dance himself.

Grace, who had been hoping for a very different partner, coloured a little at this unwished-for request; but there was no alternative for her, and she submitted with as good a grace as

she could assume, to become his partner in a quadrille. She knew him too little personally, and too well from Harry's descriptions to feel any pleasure in conversing with him, so she mentally resolved that theirs should be a silent dance; such, was not, however, his intention. Fixing his piercing black eyes on her, he began:

"Is not Mr. Cameron an excellent man, Miss Ashton?"

She assented, but quietly, and with much less warmth than she felt.

"I suppose, I ought to tell you that I heard what passed between you and him just now," continued Wildey; "you, Miss Ashton, I presume, regard him quite as a second father."

"As a very kind friend of my own father, certainly," answered she, "but I have no claim on him which can entitle me to speak of him as more."

"He is very young-looking for his age," observed the gentleman.

"Yes, remarkably so!"

"He is also very sociable and domestic in his tastes," pursued he.

Grace gave a quiet assent.

"And he feels his loneliness as a widower extremely!"

This time she was silent.

"So much so, that I fully expect he will marry again some day."

"Marry again!" echoed Grace in a tone of extreme surprise.

"Yes, why not, do you not think it likely? did you never consider how much he needs a wife?"

"I never thought about it."

"But now reflect for a moment, and I am sure you will agree with me."

"Really, it is no concern of mine," said Grace, somewhat tartly, "so I do not see why I should reflect about it."

"I should have thought you would not have been so indifferent to the comfort of one for whom you profess such a regard."

"I hope I am not indifferent to Mr. Cameron's comfort," returned she, averting her face from the malicious look of her partner's unpleasant eyes. "If my thinking could make Mr. Cameron comfortable, I would not mind setting to work about it; but I have no influence over his destiny, and nothing to do with his

matrimonal projects. I don't know amongst all my acquaintance one lady suitable in age and disposition; for, of course, she ought to be forty at the very least, and have all the amiable qualities which one human being can unite."

"Perhaps he *had* better not marry a girl," said Mr. Wildey.

"Oh, certainly not, such marriages cannot turn out well."

Just at this moment, Harry interrupted the conversation with a hurried request for the honour of Miss Ashton's hand in a polka, and Grace gave a blushing conscious assent, which, together with her last words, put James Wildey in some degree *au fait* to her real feelings.

"No fear there," muttered he, as the young couple walked away; "they have been watching each other all through the quadrille, too. I suppose they are engaged, or something like it."

He was very nearly right; Harry took this opportunity to explain himself, and his wishes, and Grace, when it was all over, decided that her twenty-first birthday had been the happiest of her life.

For much of this happiness she was indebted

to her kind godfather; he it was, who, by advancing Harry's salary, had improved his prospects, and, on being consulted by Mr. Ashton on the prudence of the engagement, had sanctioned it by his entire consent and approbation, given in a tone which implied a promise to assist the young couple if they required his patronage. She, in return, heartily wished that he had a more cheerful home, a family circle to make him as happy as her own father looked when surrounded by his children.

Such wishes she supposed must be vain, however, as in her mind, Mr. Cameron was much too old to marry again, and she had thought it unfeeling in his clerk to allude to the topic.

Mr. Cameron was a very wealthy merchant, he had been a prosperous man in his worldly concerns all his life. Succeeding early to a large mercantile establishment, he had been unwearied in his application to business, and steady in his course of conduct. His counting-house was his happiest retreat; his books were his favourite study, and his hours of business were to him hours of pleasure. Simple and old-fashioned in his habits, he had few personal

expenses, so that he continued to grow richer every year, although his name was well-known in all benevolent schemes, and his purse was open to most private applicants. Whether he would have been equally devoted to his affairs, had his attention been diverted by the claims of a family cannot be known, for he had no child to inherit his wealth, or to spend it for him, and though he had married early, most people, except himself, seemed to forget the existence of his wife whilst it lasted, and he was now a widower.

Mrs. Cameron, indeed, never did anything to make herself remembered beyond the quiet drawing-room, where, on a sofa, she passed her sleepy life. Captivated by her fair complexion, and her quiet manner of listening to him, Mr. Cameron had given her credit for all necessary good qualities, and after a short courtship had married her. Before a month had passed he discovered his mistake; her quietness was the result of indolence; she was silent, because from ignorance and vanity she had nothing to say; she accepted him because she wished to be married; not from any dreams of domestic felicity, but because she was weary

of a home where she was worried by an active, managing mother.

In short, he had made a mistake, and one for which there seemed little remedy. Discouraging, however, as was the prospect before him, with the good sense of a man who has learnt to profit by failure or success, Mr. Cameron resolved to make the best of circumstances, and since his wife as she was did not quite suit his tastes, to try and improve her became his object. He set heroically about this task, with a zeal which deserved better success. Her apathy even here baffled him completely. She was too ignorant to be aware of her own deficiencies, and too indifferent to his feelings to entertain the slightest wish of pleasing him. She was his wife; he could not get rid of her now, therefore it mattered nothing to her whether she was agreeable or the contrary.

Sometimes, indeed, she was roused from her indifference to fits of irritation at his persevering efforts to interest her in his pursuits, at others she only listened without hearing a word he said. Perhaps his subjects of discourse were rather dry, but attachment on her part would have secured attention and interest, for which

he now sought in vain. If she answered him at all, her replies were more discouraging than silence, for she comprehended nothing but her own personal wants. Why should she care, she thought, if coffee was dull, for she always drank chocolate; if the prospects in sugar were bad, he had better buy it somewhere else; and why should he fuss himself so about cotton, when there was such an abundance of the article in England already; it was nonsense, she asserted, to send such a distance for a thing which was so plentiful in the country that a large ball might be bought for a penny.

It was as hopeless to attempt to enlighten her ignorance as to excite her sympathy. She never could remember the difference between a cargo and a supercargo, or comprehend why ships should be lost when insured, and to the latest year of her life, confused the underwriters with the junior clerks in her husband's establishment.

Hopeless of improvement, her husband gave up the attempt, contented himself with attending to her personal wants, and found his pleasures and his companions elsewhere. So Mrs. Cameron lived on, treated with outward decorum and

respect by her husband, supplied with every luxury which her indolence and selfishness required, knowing as little of his thoughts and feelings as she did of his mercantile engagements, and equally indifferent to all that concerned him, as she was to the fortunes of the Emperor of China.

Patiently did Mr. Cameron bear the burden which his early rashness had brought on himself; and if the sight of a flourishing family sometimes brought a sigh, he had philosophy, or what was better, principle enough to take the good with the evil, and be thankful for the cares he had escaped, whilst he regretted the blessings he had missed.

At length, however, the yoke was broken, his wife died: and in spite of her indolence, her silence, and her dulness was much missed, and sincerely regretted by her husband. He had been used to see her, and habit had rendered her company nearly as necessary to his comfort as his easy chair or his dining-table, but like Grace Ashton, he thought himself now too old to form fresh ties.

CHAPTER II.

Do not believe his vows for they are brokers,
Not of that die which their investments shew
But mere implorators of unholy suits
The better to beguile.

One evening, about six weeks after the party just recorded, as Grace and Harry were sitting conversing together in the usual uninteresting style of young lovers, they were interrupted by the entrance of a strikingly beautiful and elegant girl, who seemed well acquainted with Grace and not unknown to Harry Dunsford.

She sat down by them, threw off her shawl and bonnet, and commenced a course of enquiries relative to Grace's affairs, which showed she was well acquainted with the preparations making for her approaching wedding, and interested in their progress.

"I have a strong impression," said she,

presently, "that if I were in your situation, Grace, just as everything was ready, I would put it off for a month."

They asked her reasons.

"Just to try my power, and the gentleman's temper. Oh! you need not look shocked, Grace, nor you indignant, Mr. Dunsford. I am not more whimsical or self-willed than any other women—except perhaps Grace herself—though every one will not own her wishes."

"I don't see how you can tell that," said Harry, rather bluntly; "but it is a common way of warding off censure for some acknowledged fault, to say, every one else thinks so, but wants the candour to own it."

"Then when you are engaged," said Grace, hastily interposing, "you expect unlimited power, I suppose, May?"

But May only arched her eyebrows, and laughed at Harry's rebuke.

"Of course I expect no less, you dreadfully matter-of-fact girl," replied she. "What is the use of a lover except to flatter one. Oh, I shall be a proper tyrant if ever I have a suitor."

"Meantime I suppose you tyrannize over your cousin, Mr. Wildey," said Grace.

"Mr. Wildey!" repeated Harry, surprised. "Are you his cousin?"

"Yes, don't you wonder at it, considering how unlike we are?" replied Miss Luttrell. "I am staying with Miss Wildey at present, and that is how I became acquainted with my darling Grace. I suppose you know my good cousin, James Wildey?"

"I know him as a junior clerk is likely to know the managing man and the confidential agent of his employer," replied Harry, by no means wishing to discuss his character at that moment.

"That is so dreadfully unromantic to talk of a junior clerk in a merchant's office, Grace; I wonder you can make up your mind to such a marriage."

"Yes, it is very surprising, I acknowledge," said Grace, laughing a little, "especially when you consider what sort of a man Harry is."

"And then you are going to be very poor too; that is such a dreadful bore—I could not stand that at all."

"I hope then when you marry you will be very rich," replied Harry.

"I will take care of that," said May; "a

large fortune—that is happiness. Jewels and fine dresses, carriages and thousands a year—oh, the delight that it must be to have money at command! Gold gives so much lustre to beauty, so much wit to folly, so much respect to the meanest origin. Give me gold, gold, gold, and happiness will be sure to follow."

"Oh, May! I never heard you talk in this way before," said Grace, quite shocked. "You cannot surely mean what you say."

"Well, what is your panacea for happiness, Grace?" asked she.

"Affection," replied Grace, looking away from Harry.

"And occupation," suggested he, "that is the secret of happiness."

"Well, and if one has gold, one is sure of affection, everybody loves the rich and despises the poor; and as to occupation, with money enough, I would buy an unlimited supply of lambswool for embroidery, and go to the opera every night in the season. That would be occupation enough for any rational young lady."

"I do not believe these are your genuine sentiments May," observed Grace.

"Indeed they are, and the result of ex-

perience, too. I will tell you how I learned them. I was walking in Kensington Gardens with my two cousins, when we met a man: yes, he called himself a gentleman, and a nobleman, too. He knew my cousin James, and spoke to him; then he saw me, and turned and walked with us; talking to me pleasantly enough. He followed us home, and during our whole walk, his manners expressed unequivocal, but not disrespectful admiration: any woman can see when a man admires her; and whatever some people may pretend, I do not believe any one could be offended at it. But when he had learned from James that I was poor—portionless—dependent—it's a fact, Mr. Dunsford, and I am not ashamed of it—you should have seen the change in his manner!" Miss Luttrell's cheeks crimsoned, and her eyes flashed as she recalled the scene. "Yes, that nobleman thought because I was poor I was also base. He insulted me—oh, how my blood boiled! and James did not knock him down, or kick him out of the house; because, forsooth, he was a peer, and I only the portionless daughter of a lieutenant in the navy. Ah, might I but be rich, might I but have wealth

pour toute ressource. Had my uncle not been musical, I should have gone mad, but he is a splendid performer, and so with my pianoforte, and French, and German, and old English histories, I contrived to wear out fifteen years of my life, without much suffering; but now, how shall I ever go back to this solitude, having once seen a little change, and known the pleasures of variety? Not yet, at least, not yet."

"Does not your uncle miss you, May?" said Grace. "He must be sad alone."

"Oh, he is not a person to mind being alone, he pores over some antiquated folio, or performs divine concertos on his violin, and takes his breakfast and dinner in profound ignorance whether I am present or not."

"I should hardly think that possible," said Harry, slyly.

"Now that might mean a very gallant compliment, Mr. Dunsford, if you did not look so uncommonly quizzical as you spoke, but I understand you very well: I make such a noise that you think no one could be unaware of my presence, is not that it?"

"No one who has ever heard you sing, May,"

said her friend, "could forget you easily. Do you know, Harry, she sings divinely. Do, May, give us a song now."

"I will give you anything I can, Grace; twenty songs if you like," and going to the pianoforte, she seated herself, and began without the smallest affectation or hesitation, one of her prettiest songs; she certainly had a magnificent voice, and a thorough knowledge of music. She had chosen a melancholy air, and the deep, passionate tones of her voice, and the perfect taste with which she performed it, touched her auditors deeply. Tears again gathered in Grace's eyes, and her lip quivered with emotion, at which Harry did not wonder.

May's voice died away in mournful murmurs, faint and sweet as a distant echo; turning round she saw Grace sitting in a profound reverie, whilst Harry was gazing at her with an air of such extraordinary devotion as almost provoked the merry girl into a fit of laughter. Hastily rising, she slipped behind her friend, and then leaning over her shoulder, aroused her from her dream by a loud exclamation of "Bo!"

At this moment, Mr. Ashton and the rest of the family entered, and the children were soon

hanging round May, dear May, pretty May, and one was twining her fat fingers in her long curls; and another was begging her to sing about 'the farmer who lived in the North Countrie;' whilst Robert vociferously required of Grace that she should instantly play a polka, that Miss Luttrell, (for Robert would not call her May as the children did, and thought he was very much in love with her,) that Miss Luttrell might continue her lessons from him, as she was learning, under his tuition, the step of that fascinating dance.

"You monkeys," said May, shaking herself clear of the little ones, "you desperate little monkeys, get you gone, you treat me with no more respect than if I were a baby; I will marry a duke, and wear a train two yards long, trailing on the ground, and then see if I don't cut all your heads off, if you tread upon it."

"Duchess May, Duchess May," shouted the children, dancing round her with infinite glee, "only think of Duchess May."

"Duchess May-be," said Harry, gravely bowing before her, "Grace is performing to admiration Jullien's Polka, and all she wants to make her quite happy, is to know when

you will be good enough to begin your dancing."

"Come, Robert," said she laughing, and taking his hand, she walked away into the other room, whilst Harry was claimed by Jane, who declared it to be impossible to sit still to Grace's playing.

She stayed with them until after supper, and then prepared to leave them with a sigh, asking Robert to see her home; but Grace bade Harry go instead, he would be leaving, she said, of course immediately, and although out of his route, that did not signify. Harry would rather have loitered another half hour with Grace, but he obeyed her commands with all due submission, and was rewarded for it by the eloquent praises of Grace, which May Luttrell continued to pour out, during the whole of their walk.

Mr. Cameron had promised to give away Grace Ashton, on the occasion of her marriage, but, unfortunataly, the day before, he was seized with a bilious attack, which incapacitated him from performing his promise; Grace had half a mind to put off the ceremony, but he would not hear of that, to Harry's great joy. May Luttrell had insisted on being bride's-maid on

the occasion, and Grace had no objection, but this gay young lady was not very well satisfied with the wedding. It was, she declared, shabby and dull; Grace ought to have had a smarter dress than her simple white muslin, there ought to have been six bride's-maids at least, a splendid breakfast, and crowds of well-dressed company.

"It's all very well to say that you hate finery, and don't marry for other people to talk about you, but I am certain a great deal of conjugal happiness is secured by attention to outward forms. The possession of a splendid lace veil is a good of which no subsequent domestic misery can deprive you; and if you have no other pleasure, a well-furnished *trousseau* will secure a decent share. If ever I marry, I will shine as a bride, and no one shall see me without envy and admiration."

Jane Ashton quite agreed with her; but May's opinions of Grace's future infelicity, so far as they were derived from her simple gown, and quiet party, were rather shaken, when she saw the sincere and devoted affection with which the young husband regarded his bride, and heard the warm paternal blessing bestowed upon her. After all, so amiable a girl, and so

much beloved, though poor, could not fail of being happy.

She spent the evening with the Ashtons, and by her lively nonsense, contributed to keep up their spirits, which were naturally rather depressed by the departure of Grace from their family circle. 'The happy pair,' were gone down for a week to the neighbourhood of Windsor, where a cottage had been lent to them by a good old aunt of Harry's, to whose kindness and liberality they were in part indebted for those arrangements which enabled the young people to commence housekeeping at such an early age.

In the meantime, Miss Luttrell was busy perfecting herself in dancing, a part of her education much neglected during her abode in Lincolnshire, and making sad ravages in the heart of Robert Ashton, who fell in love with her after the fashion in vogue amongst young gentlemen of the ripe age of nineteen; that is, making sketches of her figure as well as he could; writing her name in numerous quaint hieroglyphics; inditing rather stiff and strained verses in her praise; copying new music at her bidding; and being perfectly ready to fight with

any one, who should venture to deny that she was more beautiful, amiable, and clever than any other creature under the sun.

May enjoyed this excessively, and did everything she could to increase the admiration of her youthful lover, shewing on the occasion, a spirit of coquetry and vanity which must have been natural to her, as it could hardly have been taught by her uncle amongst the fens of the east country.

"Where did you spend yesterday, May?" said Mr. Wildey to her at breakfast, the morning after Grace's wedding.

"With the Ashtons," replied she, carelessly.

"What, all day! what were you doing there?"

"Helping to marry Grace, James; she was sacrificed in white muslin, at the hymeneal altar yesterday morning, and now bears the name of Dunsford."

"Oh, she's married, is she? More fool Dunsford, then, to cumber himself with a wife at his age; he will never be a rich man."

"I dare say not; but I am not sure that he has not a good chance of being a happy one for all that."

"Nonsense, poverty and happiness are in-

compatible; surely you know that, May, from experience."

"Poverty, my wise cousin James, is comparative, and depends on the disposition of the holder. Some people require a great deal of money, and others only need a great deal of affection. Harry and Grace Dunsford are of this latter number."

"Rubbish! all the affection in the world will not find them in coals and candles, May; depend upon it, wealth is happiness, and an imprudent marriage is misery."

"Don't be alarmed and excited, James; I am not going to ask *you* to make an imprudent marriage, or persuade you to sit down on a competence and affection. You will never have enough of either to make you happy, I am convinced; you are always aspiring to more, more!"

There was a slightly sarcastic tone in her voice, as she spoke, of which he was perfectly aware.

"True, my pretty cousin; I do aspire to a large income—no mean competence will satisfy me; or give me the power of carrying out my

plans for happiness, and if I do not mistake your character, you will agree with me. You too, May, are possessed of an enlarged soul and a high ambition, which will not be satisfied with a grovelling situation. Is it not so ?"

"Upon my word I don't know," said the young lady, sipping her coffee. "I do not understand anything about enlarged souls, nor do I know whether mine is better than my neighbours. I should like to be happy and not go back to Lincolnshire again certainly."

"And the only way to secure that is to become mistress of a large fortune."

"Become mistress of a large fiddlestick, James ! What have I to do with large fortunes ? They are not scattered about for the girls in London to pick up if they please."

"But tell me, should you not like to be rich, May ?"

"Of course I should; I should like to be a duchess or a countess at least."

"That is not likely at all; you have great beauty, it is true, and if you only had money, I dare say you might get any rank you liked: but you have so little chance of meeting with

any peers in our line of life; certainly, if you went on the stage you might have a fair opening; your figure and voice would make your fortune at once, and you might soon, if you managed discreetly, win a coronet."

"Thank you, James," said May, rather indignantly, "I dare say I am going to stoop to conquer. I think I see myself— However," changing her tone into a more careless one, "I suppose you are only joking, so I will not put myself in a passion—it is not worth while."

"Upon my honour, I am serious, May; I really think it is your best chance of earning a title."

"Than I shall do without it?"

"But if money, great wealth, an excellent house, a magnificent allowance, a splendid settlement would suit you, coupled with an untitled, but very good tempered, easy, manageable husband, who would give you your own way, and provide an establishment like a princess, I could, I have little doubt, help you to that; on certain conditions at least."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, what do you think of the prospect?"

"It is very well, but what are your conditions?"

"Oh, simple enough. You must promise distinctly to aid me in advancing my fortune in my line; as I shall have assisted you in yours. If I procure you a splendid establishment and fashionable acquaintance, you must in return stand by me in my efforts to rise in the world. I wish to be partner where I now am inferior; in this you must be my coadjutor."

"But what in the world shall I have to do with that, I know no more of your business than I do of the Eleusinian mysteries, and much less than I do of the conclaves in the Vatican."

"Nonsense, what have I to do with Vaticans and such stuff; and as to mysteries, pretty May, there is no need that you should penetrate those of our counting-house. Promise to do as I bid you, with regard to them; you have knowledge enough for that."

"A little too much, Mr. James Wildey," said May, drawing herself up. "Pray what sort of bargain did you wish me to make with Lord Marcus, the other day. I know I must be on my guard with you and your friends. I have learned that much already."

"My dear May, my dear little, innocent, excellent, spirited cousin, you quite misunderstood me; I only wanted you to listen to his lordship's flatteries, and give him a few pretty smiles, until I had got my poor brother the stewardship. I had not the least, not the slightest notion of your doing anything more; you could not suppose I would sell your honour at such a price!"

"Not if you could get a higher for it, I dare say," retorted May, angrily.

"You do me the grossest injustice, May; these are the most unkind, ungenerous suspicions. You were most unnecessarily alarmed at Lord Marcus' language in the first place; and in the second, if I had for a moment supposed him capable of insulting you, I would have pulled his nose and kicked him down-stairs—I would, indeed, upon my honour. No brother could value you more than I do, May, nor love you better, and I feel all the pain which a brother would feel at such an accusation. You hurt me deeply."

Wildey could act well, and May, in proportion as she was open and free-spoken herself, was inclined to be generous in her judgment of others. The peculiar style of her education made her

less reserved in her manners and expressions than those girls who have been brought up under female superintendence. An extensive acquaintance with writers of the last two centuries, and also of continental authors, had not tended to promote the delicacy of her mind, and her ideas of life and society being drawn from the pages of Addison, Pope or Molière, were not precisely accordant with modern refinements.

She was sorry she had hurt her cousin's feelings, and began to think she had judged him hastily; he was so very kind and indulgent to her, that perhaps he really did entertain the affection he described, in which case he certainly might be trusted. So she said very kindly, and holding out her hand as she spoke.

"I beg your pardon, James; tell me what you wish."

"No, I will not interfere any farther," said he, in the same proud, injured tone; "if you can think so ill of me, I cannot expect you to listen to my plans. It is true they were for your benefit, but never mind. Culpable as you suppose me to be, you cannot trust me; you had better leave us at once, for if I am capable

of the baseness you suspect, I certainly am unfit to be your host or protector."

"Indeed I would not suspect you of anything, my dear cousin, and I will do what you please; I did not mean to hurt your feelings, pray forgive me."

"Forgive you, yes, May, I cannot help forgiving you!" said he, taking the hand she laid on his, "I love you too well to bear malice; and to show you that I do, I will not ask for your promise of help; you shall have the power of forming a wealthy marriage, and I will struggle through life as I can; content with seeing you happy and prosperous. Only be kind to my poor sister," added he, with an affecting solemnity, which might have suited a dying bequest, or a speech preparatory to a perpetual separation.

May was quite softened by this pathos, and warmly exclaimed:

"I did you injustice, indeed, James; I had not believed you so kind and generous. I promise you, freely, fully to act upon your directions, and do everything you desire to advance your fortunes, and raise you to the

position you deserve. Upon my word and honour I make you this promise, and now shake hands, we are friends."

Wildey leant over, and warmly kissed the glowing cheek of his pretty cousin, rather more warmly than she either expected or wished, but she let it pass in silence.

"Yes, May, we are friends, and shall, no doubt, always continue such. And now, dear cousin, I will set seriously to work to bring about this marriage as soon as possible, and thus build up both our fortunes."

"Well, but who is the gentleman?" inquired May, with a very natural degree of curiosity on this important point.

"Did you not see Mr. Cameron at the Ashtons one night, May?"

"Your Mr. Cameron, yes; but he has no son, has he?"

"No, but he is a widower, May, and wants a wife, himself."

"He? why, he is such an old man; old enough to be my grandfather!"

"He is about sixty, I know; but then he is immensely rich, and I know he would be glad

to marry again, when the year of mourning is out. He is very good-tempered, liberal and indulgent. If you married him, you might do as you liked in everything."

"But he is so old," persisted May, in a disconsolate voice.

"True, but you know you cannot have everything you want; choose between Lincolnshire and London; your uncle and Mr. Cameron; the dull library and a splendid establishment; old literature, and the Park and opera; wading through muddy roads, or driving a splendid turn-out, and riding a thorough-bred Arab in town. Come, May, do you hesitate?"

"If he were only twenty years younger!"

"But you know the proverb, 'it is better to be an old man's darling than a young man's slave;' depend upon it, riches and honour are the best, the very best recipe for happiness."

"Well, I choose," said May, with a reluctant sigh; "I will marry Mr. Cameron if he will marry me, and do all I can to second you. But I must say I wish he were younger."

"Then he would not be so rich; no, no, May, we must take the goods fortune deigns to place within our reach, and not lose the substance in grasping the shadow. Remember our bargain; and good-bye."

CHAPTER III.

HOR. I can, Petruchio, help thee to a wife.
With wealth enough and young and beauteous
Brought up as best becomes a gentlewoman.

TAMING THE SHREW.

MR. WILDEY did not speak at random, or without sufficient foundation, when he asserted that Mr. Cameron was desirous of forming a second marriage, nor did he overrate his influence in fancying that he could bring it about as best suited his own plans.

The good merchant had really suffered very much on the death of his wife. Accustomed for five-and-thirty years to see her sitting by his hearth, and having become quite used to her unvarying manners and apathetic remarks, there seemed now a doleful blank and a dreary

silence in his apartments. He was alone, he had no one belonging to him, no one who had a claim on him, no one to love or be loved by him. Owner of vast wealth, which was ever increasing, for whom did he toil, for whom did he accumulate riches? He had no son to bear his name, no daughter to smile on his old age; he was cheerless and solitary, and with all his property, he was, in fact, poorer than his clerk, Mr. Ashton, for he was rich in affection, in domestic pleasures, in household enjoyments. Mr. Cameron would have given half his profits for a daughter like Grace, and a whole year's income for a son like Harry Dunsford.

Wishing was idle and unprofitable, a useless expenditure of capital both in time and trouble; and yet he could neither suppress his wishes, nor conceal them. On the contrary, he more than once bewailed to his confidential adviser, the sad vacuum which he found by his fireside, and the dreariness of his home, without friend or companion.

At first, Mr. Wildey listened with deep and compassionate attention, saying everything he could to increase his patron's sense of loneliness, and to heighten his wish for that do-

mestic enjoyment which seemed so completely out of his reach. Apparently, Mr. Cameron found his sympathy so agreeable that he soon sought it again, and he then communicated to Wildey a scheme which he had in his head, of adopting a son, and bringing him up as his own. Ashton, observed the merchant, had some fine boys, one of them would be just what he should wish, he would propose it to the father, send the lad to Eton, and give him an education to prepare him for the possession of the noble fortune which should eventually be bequeathed to him.

This was a plan effectually to startle Wildey, threatening as it did to overthrow his dearest hopes, his long-cherished dreams of ambition. Imagine the effect to himself if Ashton were the father of Mr. Cameron's heir: if *his* family were to gain such a footing in the house; if a son of *his* were one day to become master of this coveted wealth. It was enough to make his heart wither with envy, malice, and every evil passion, merely to entertain such an idea for an hour. Deep vengeance vowed he in his mind against the unlucky father of the lad thus proposed to be elevated; firmly he resolved to

rest not day or night, till he had crushed this family, and caused them to vanish from the circle where he trod. But, meantime, some immediate measure must be taken to avert a blow, which once suffered to fall, might produce irremediable results. Whilst Mr. Cameron was expatiating on the pleasure he expected from this step, Wildey's active mind was reviewing his own position, and settling on the best plan of operations. At length he spoke, and it was to praise his generous patron's nobleness and goodness, which could lead him to devise such a scheme. The only thing against it was, that these sort of plans seldom turned out well; there were so many drawbacks to adoption. The character of the boy in question, who could tell what that might prove; or how far such a sudden change of prospect might alter it for the worse. Adopted sons could not be controlled as one's own children might, and, of course, could not feel the same affection. Valueing themselves on being necessary to their patron, they only too often were eternal plagues and torments: they seemed to think the favour was on their side, and that in allowing themselves to be called sons, they earned a right in

every other respect to do precisely as they pleased. He had never known an instance where an arrangement of the sort had turned out well to both parties; and it would deeply grieve him if his honoured patron and employer were to be deprived of domestic peace and happiness in his old age, by the wild vagaries of a young man, thoughtless, extravagant, and selfish. To all this Mr. Cameron objected, though with some hesitation, that the good education which he would bestow on his *protégé* would effectually prevent all risk of such a calamity.

Mr. Wildey then proceeded to represent the risk to his own character in taking such a step; who would trouble themselves to enquire the real origin of his nominal son? would not the good-natured world immediately suppose that the boy had a claim on him, and that in making him his heir, he only gave him what was justly his due.

Mr. Cameron did not seem to think that this objection was of much importance; but he added, that if Wildey could propose a better scheme, he was ready to listen to him.

"I should propose, then, my dear Sir, if it is left

to me, that instead of taking charge of a boy, who may turn out you know not what, you should seek a wife who may promote your happiness at once by her companionship at home, and bring you a fair progeny of your own to bear your name, and bless your old age."

"A wife, Wildey! you are joking! at my age a wife!"

"Yes, Sir, I repeat it—a wife. What is there so preposterous in that idea? It is a thing which happens every day in the world: men much older than you have made happy marriages, and more than repaired the misfortunes of their youth by the blessings which crown their old age. Why should not you try the same course?"

"But Wildey, a wife whose age was suitable to mine—think of that!"

"And must you marry an old woman because you are a little past the prime of life. Excuse me, Sir, but I cannot help smiling at the idea; you have no appearance of age yourself, your step is firm and vigorous, your spirits good, your health excellent, and you show less sign of advanced age than many men of forty.

There are dozens of women, ay and pretty young women too, who would gladly accept your hand."

"One would be enough; but upon my honour, I don't know one. There's your sister, whom I don't think I should like, and Grace Ashton who has married. I don't remember any other woman."

Mr. Wildey laughed, then said: "My dear Sir, you certainly need a little help here, for you do not half estimate your advantages. Tell me what you would like to find in your wife! I mean as to mental qualifications; money of course you do *not* want."

"No, no, I do not care how poor she might be; but good temper, Wildey, mildness, gentleness, and some intelligence, neither a very great genius, nor quite a dunce, and good principles, steadiness and prudence, youth and health, and as much beauty as I could get—for as to that, I suppose at my age I must not look out for a great deal; eh, Wildey?"

"I really believe I know the lady who would suit you precisely! she is a friend of my sister's; she has seen you, and she admired you very

much, as I happen to know from Ann herself. I dare say you did not notice her, but she saw you one night at the Ashtons, and was very much struck by you. It would be very good, if after all she said, she should be your bride."

"Saw me! well, I don't remember any one in particular; what was she like?"

"A sweet pretty girl—dark hair in long waving ringlets, superb complexion, not very tall, beautiful bust and shoulders; and she is as clever as she is good and lively; sings like an angel; she has not a halfpenny of her own, but is more spirited and disinterested than if she had thousands. She refused a rich lord the other day—a handsome fine young man—only for want of character. But, my dear Sir, I ought not to have let that slip—it was told me in confidence; you must not mention it to any one."

"Well, I promise to keep your secret; but, Wildey, my good fellow, how happens it that you are ready to make over this charming girl to me? I wonder you never thought of her for yourself."

"I, Sir? I am too poor and too young to

marry. Twenty years hence, if you will give me your eldest daughter, I shall be most happy to become your son-in-law."

"My son-in-law! what a delightful idea!" said Mr. Cameron, rubbing his hands. "Give you my eldest daughter!—charming! Ah, but, Wildey,"—changing his tone—"I shall never live to see that day; I must not expect it at my age."

"And why not, Sir? Do you not every day hear of men of eighty enjoying perfect health and every comfort—and what should prevent your doing so? Who bids fairer to live to a fine old age than yourself? I only wish I had your constitution."

"Well, well, we shall see; but I am not married yet, and you know I have not even seen the lady. Besides, Wildey, I really must wait for six months longer—decency requires it. I would not fail in respect to the late Mrs. Cameron's memory on any account in the world. So it is no use thinking of it now!"

"Of course, Sir, you must wait the proper time before you marry; but you need not wait to make the necessary preparations. If you marry at the end of the twelvemonth's mourning,

nobody can say anything against it. But you may take every preparatory step previously. The first is to make acquaintance with the young lady."

"Ay, and how must I manage that?"

"Oh, I can easily manage that. I will come and dine with you, and bring my sister and her friend. You shall ask them all in proper form; we need not have any one else—just a snug little party of four; and then you will have plenty of time to make up your mind on the subject."

"Very well; don't put it off—let it be as soon as possible Could you not all come to-morrow, eh, Wildey?"

"I must see the lady first, Sir: she may have engagements to interfere."

"Engagements! why, Wildey, I thought you had assured me she was not engaged; it would not do if she were to jilt some one else for me."

"Oh, I only spoke of engagements to parties. She may be invited to some ball or dinner, which would interfere. I know her heart has no engagement, unless her prepossession for you be considered as one."

Mr. Cameron suffered no small degree of impatience during the interval, brief as it was, which elapsed before he was introduced to the young lady on whom so many hopes were built. The pains which he took that evening in arranging his toilet, were such as he had never bestowed on such an affair before. His waistcoat was a matter of deep consideration, and he purchased a handsome gold watch-guard to wear in honour of the meeting. He arranged this round his neck in two or three different ways before the glass; but the novelty was unpleasing to him.

"If she does not like me for myself," thought he, "she shall not say I charmed her by finery," so he returned the chain to its case, and carried it down stairs, when he adjourned to the drawing-room to receive his guests. He had done every thing he could to make this room look gay and cheerful. Beautiful flowers were profusely set about the room, two delicate bouquets were prepared for the use of the lady guests, and a superb pianoforte now occupied a space where an antiquated beaufet had formerly stood. Had there been time, he would have replaced the whole of the old-fashioned furniture with the richest specimens of modern taste; but as this

was impossible, he had taken care to load his table with books of engravings, and portfolios of drawings, such as he had seen in the drawing-rooms where he sometimes visited.

They came. The merchant trembled with excitement as he heard the sound of steps, and the rustle of female dress approaching. The door opened, and his clerk appeared, with his sister on one arm, and on the other, such a lovely young girl as Mr. Cameron had seldom seen. The introduction took place, and the old gentleman saw the most bewitching smiles play over Miss Luttrell's face, as he expressed the pleasure it gave him to receive her in his house. He seated them with due form and ceremony on the sofa, himself fetched May a footstool, and then stood before her, conversing on her opinion of London, her admiration of its shops, and her vehement wish to go to the opera; on all which topics she freely imparted her mind to him.

There was nothing peculiar in what she said, but the flash of her bright eyes gave an irresistible point to her sentiments, and imparted to her conversation all the brilliance of wit. Mr. Cameron was delighted with her, and his admiration was so very evident as to gratify her

exceedingly. Without stopping to consider why, she was pleased to make an impression even on a man of his age; and she exerted herself to the utmost to increase and deepen this impression.

Wildey contemplated the two with much internal satisfaction; he foresaw that if Mr. Cameron yielded to the infatuation which was coming over him, and took May for his wife, he would become a complete slave to the wilful girl. She would make as heavy demands upon his time as upon his purse, for she would be governed by every impulse of a wild imagination, set free from an unnatural and unwelcome restraint. There would no longer be time to devote to business; it would be absolutely impossible for the merchant to inspect his books; he would become a stranger in his counting-house, and Wildey might do as he pleased there. If, then, he could maintain his own control of May—and of this he did not doubt—he should himself rule the whole establishment. She would never be content with this dull city residence; a house in Belgravia, suited to her husband's fortune, would be her first object—indeed it should certainly be so;

for it would be convenient to remove Mr. Cameron, and Wildey would have no difficulty in making her insist upon it. He himself would take up his residence here, as soon as Mr. Cameron removed; it would suit him perfectly well in many respects, and he could easily put the doing so in such a light, that the merchant should consider it a favour on the part of his head clerk that he consented to reside there. It would be very easy then, to diminish the establishment of clerks; he should have no difficulty in dismissing as many as he chose, and Ashton and Dunsford among the first; he would retain only such as would support his views, and connive at any dubious proceedings on his part. As to the diminution of salaries, it would be unnecessary; he should himself pocket the difference, as it would be very convenient to have such an addition to his income. He should give parties, keep a carriage, and indulge in other expenses, which would require extra means. His time for self-denial and poverty was almost past; the hour of enjoyment and pleasure was fast approaching.

All these thoughts crossed his busy brain as he sat watching his cousin conversing gaily with Mr. Cameron, and saw the unequivocal symp-

toms which the old gentleman's conduct betrayed of the influence which youth and beauty possessed over him.

Of the little party, Miss Wildey alone was tranquil and self-possessed, and entirely unoccupied by speculative dreams or ambitious hopes. She had not imagination enough to indulge in idle fancies or brilliant castles in the air: so she quietly ate her dinner, and tried to discover how the dishes which her brother praised, were cooked, in the hope of giving him satisfaction on some future occasion.

The gentlemen did not remain very long over their wine after the two young ladies withdrew, long enough for the merchant to indulge in a burst of enthusiastic praise, respecting the lovely young creature whom he hoped to make his wife, with repeated protestations that she was too good for him, much too good; and that he should be the most lucky man in the world if he succeeded in persuading such an angel to accept his hand.

Wildey agreed to her praises, but demurred to the fact of Mr. Cameron's want of corresponding merit; it was evident the lady was very much inclined towards him; he should

almost say she was quite in love, only he supposed it was hardly fair to assume it of one of the fair sex; however, he hoped Mr. Cameron would not trifle with her feelings; there could be no reason to hesitate, and although precipitation was to be avoided, yet if he doubted or delayed, he would certainly prove himself unworthy the happiness in store for him, the possession of so beautiful a person for his wife. Thus encouraged, the merchant returned to her society with an eagerness that in his advanced years, and usual sobriety of action, was not a little remarkable.

He found May examining the gold chain which he had that morning purchased, and which he had carelessly thrown down on the table.

"What a lovely chain, Mr. Cameron!" said she, looking up as he approached, "have you so many of these *bijoux* that you toss them about your room, for I picked this up from the floor?"

"I believe it is the only one of the kind which I have in the world, Miss Luttrell; I do not care for these sort of things the least. Do you think it pretty?"

"Pretty, oh, yes, it is beautiful; ah, how happy you are to have money enough to buy all these sort of charming trifles. I might cry my eyes out, and never get one," was her thoughtless answer.

"I shall never wear it," he observed, smiling.

She twisted it round her pretty arm, and held it out to look at its effect, then laid it down with a little sigh. He was longing to ask her to accept it, but he was not quite sure how to put his wish into words, but after a little hesitation, he said:

"Is it not meant to put round the neck, allow me to place it round yours to judge of its effect there."

"No, no," said May, laughing, and drawing back, "you had better not, for if you put it there, I shall never allow you to take it off again."

"That threat does not alarm me," replied he, still advancing the chain, and finally throwing it over her head: it caught in her long curls, as might have been expected, and got entangled in the luxuriant and glossy braids behind. He tried to release it, in great trepi-

dation, and succeeded in pulling down her long hair about her neck and shoulders, a *gaucherie* at which he was extremely shocked, but at which May laughed merrily.

"Come, Mr. Cameron," said she, "I will trouble you to rebuild what you have destroyed. Be so good as to pin up my hair again, unless you particularly wish me to continue in this *négligée* style all the evening."

"Upon my honour, I know nothing of dressing hair, Miss Luttrell, or I should be most happy: and really, it looks so extremely pretty as it is, I do not see why you should change it."

"It must look rather untidy," returned she, "and I do not wish your servants to suppose I have been either romping or fighting; so pray, Ann, put it up for me."

Miss Wildey complied, and observing the chain round her neck, she said:

"Law! how beautiful, my dear; has Mr. Cameron given you that?"

"No," said May, concisely; colouring, and attempting to take it off.

"Pray don't," said Mr. Cameron, taking

hold of her hand to stop her, "will you not let it stay where it looks so lovely? Do accept it from me."

"I will not," replied she, still more abruptly.

Mr. Cameron looked disconcerted, and Mr. Wildey interfered.

"Why should you refuse," said he, anxiously, and trying to convey to her by his looks that she ought to accept the gift. "I am sure you are depriving Mr. Cameron of a pleasure he well deserves, in declining such a trifle, a trifle to him, at least. Do take it."

"Take it yourself," said she, scornfully tossing it on the table, "no one shall say that I received golden chains from Mr. Cameron's hands."

Wildey looked alarmed and uneasy: May was acting a dangerous part, he thought, and he dreaded lest she should mar his plans by her impatience and want of self-control.

Mr. Cameron himself stood gazing at her with an expression his clerk could not understand, but after a short and rather awkward pause, the merchant suddenly recommenced the conversation by telling Miss Luttrell he knew

she was musical, and begging her to try his pianoforte.

She consented, and he led her to the instrument, whilst Wildey taking up a newspaper, sank into an arm-chair, and seemed intent on studying it. May seated herself and began without a word; her admirer at first, stood behind her, then he seated himself, and leaning on the back of his chair, gazed with profound admiration at her beautiful face; perfectly entranced by the harmony to which she gave utterance.

At first she performed an Italian air; but then she changed and began an English song, to this effect.

A simple maiden I,
'Tis true!
But gold shall never buy
My love, in vain you try
To woo!

Worthless each sparkling gem,
Although
'Twould grace a diadem,
I will not look on them,—
Hush! Go!

Think not with wealth to bind,
The heart!
E'en could you chain the wind
True love, free, unconfined
Will start.

A heart, kind, loyal, true,
Above
All harms that fate can do,
I vow, when such shall sue,
To love.

The air was simple, and she sang the words with emphasis, as she turned her eyes on him; at that moment it was genuine feeling, not coquetry which inspired her; she really meant what she said. But the greatest refinement of art would not have been more effectual in winning his good opinion. He looked at her very attentively for a minute after she had concluded, and then said quietly,

"If you mean, that I have hurt your feelings by offering you that chain, Miss Luttrell, I really beg your pardon. I am so little used to the society of ladies, that perhaps I may offend against etiquette unknowingly; but pray set it down to ignorance, and not to ill intention."

She coloured, and ran her fingers over the

keys for a short time, before making any reply, then without looking up, she answered.

"You need not say any more about it!"

"I was afraid you were angry," said he.

"Quite unnecessary, I am no such thing; shall I sing again?"

"Do by all means, I never heard such music; it is heavenly."

She smiled graciously, and continued.

Mr. Wildey peeping from behind his paper, was satisfied that all things were progressing fairly.

May resumed her usual spirits, and continued to charm her admirer alternately by song or conversation, during the rest of the evening; they did not separate till late, and then it was evident that unless in some sudden fit of petulance, or wild outbreak of feeling, May should destroy her own schemes, she had as fair a chance of becoming Mrs. Cameron in proper time as any one could wish.

On reaching home, Wildey began,

"Well, my sweet little May, my dear, clever, spirited cousin—"

"I really wish James," interrupted she petulantly, "that when you speak to me, you would

be content to call me by my name, and leave out those absurd and tiresome epithets, with which you so often garnish it."

"I will call you any thing you like May," said he somewhat surprised at her tone, "I was only going to say, how very well you played your part to-night, and that if you go on as you have done, you will have the old gentleman at your feet in no time, and we shall secure our dearest wishes."

"I was not playing any part," retorted she, "I was merely acting in a natural way, and doing what I liked. Mr. Cameron is a worthy and excellent man, and it becomes you, James, in your situation, both for your own sake and mine to speak of him with respect."

"I think," replied he, angry at this allusion to his subordinate situation, and thrown off his guard by her unexpected reply, "I think it is scarcely becoming in you, May, to address me in this way. You are not Mrs. Cameron yet, young lady, and you had better remember that it depends on me to make or mar your prospects; to raise you to the heights of opulence; or to send you back to your insignificance and dependence in Lincolnshire."

May's eyes flashed at this taunt; she drew herself up with a scornful air, and looked at him for a moment with pale cheeks and compressed lips.

"I am not sure that I shall not go of my own accord, Mr. James Wildey, and that dependence on my uncle is not preferable to being the tool of your schemes. I mistrust you, cousin; I suspect that you have sinister and unfair designs in your wishes for my advancement. I will not be your slave or your victim."

Wildey was taken quite by surprise at this sudden declaration, and he hastily and imprudently replied: "You cannot help yourself, May; I have your promise that you will follow my wishes, and do as I desire you!"

"If I accept Mr. Cameron's hand!" was her answer. "All depends upon that, and I do not think I shall, when such is the price set on it. I will go home at once to my uncle!"

She ran out of the room, and bolting the door of her own apartment, threw herself into a chair to think and reflect. She reviewed her situation, her wishes, and her promises; she considered Mr. Cameron's character, his temper, his wealth; she weighed his importance and

her own insignificance; the difference which must exist between his wife, and the niece of a gentleman of small fortune in the country: the probable advantage of the change, and the positive evil of remaining as she was. Had her cousin only been out of the question she should not have hesitated a moment; the character and position of Mr. Cameron, in her mind were quite sufficient compensation for his want of youth. She should probably never have a more advantageous prospect than now offered itself, but for the one drawback of her promise to James Wildey. To what that promise bound her, she did not exactly know; she had an idea that her cousin was a designing and a dangerous man, and she dreaded that he might require too much of her, if she once put herself in his power. Her fears of him were vague and unfixed; sometimes a casual observation would increase them, and give birth to an absolute feeling of dislike; for it was not so much his actions which made her mistrust him, as trifling circumstances occurring when he seemed off his guard. Then her doubts would gradually die away, and her fears subside, when

she experienced his kindness, or enjoyed the amusements he procured her.

In short, his character was an enigma which she could not explain, and his mind an abyss she could not fathom; but which she perceived dimly in her path, and which at times filled her with dread. But should she for this renounce the career she had proposed to herself; should she forego the advantages of wealth and fashion, from fear of him, or could she not out-manœuvre him, and instead of becoming his slave make him hers in return; the idea flashed on her mind, was considered resolved on, and reduced to a plan. She did not stop to weigh the right or wrong of such a course; she would not ask herself if principle, prudence, propriety did not forbid it; she only asked if it was possible, and her fancy told her it was.

Yes, she would make James Wildey repent that he had ventured to threaten her; but his repentance should be in vain; of what use were her talents, her beauty, her knowledge, if she could not captivate a heart like his; if she could not make him the most devoted of slaves. She resolved to be a good wife to Mr. Cameron; and

by thus securing the submission of his clerk she believed that she should be also increasing her husband's happiness, which otherwise might be compromised by her unfortunate promise. Of the danger attending such a desperate course, she was perfectly ignorant, she had no misgivings as to her own strength of mind; and even felt a pleasure in baffling plot with plot, in meeting mine with countermine, never doubting which would be the conqueror. Meantime, Wildey himself was equally engaged in schemes with respect to her; schemes, dark, dangerous, and reckless as his own nature. He had been perplexed by her sudden outbreak of temper; there was something in her he did not understand; a depth, and tone in her mind for which he was not prepared—she had a spirit which seemed to revolt at what some call meanness and cunning, but which Wildey esteemed wisdom and discretion. He must not allow her to mistrust him—he was glad she had said she did—he must exert himself to do away such an idea—to efface all such impressions. It was easy to affect the most touching candour, the most captivating generosity and greatness of soul, such as May could not possibly resist; he

would conquer her affections, he would win her heart, and then armed with her promise which should be seconded by her inclination, he should bend her to his purposes, and rule everything by her means.

CHAPTER IV.

Ros. But come now I will be your Rosalind in a more coming-on disposition: and ask me what you will and I will grant it.—AS YOU LIKE IT.

THE cousins met in the morning, each head full of schemes, each heart palpitating with anxiety; but May's ready wit gave her the advantage. Besides circumstances favoured her in an unexpected degree, Wildey came down out of temper, because a button was missing from the wristband of his shirt. This was his sister's fault, and one which always brought down on her a vehement storm of indignation. She knew, he said, there was nothing vexed him so much, and it was so easy to avoid it with a little care; she had only to look at the linen, no such mighty task, he should imagine,

yet it happened perpetually; and so on, through a long string of such reproaches, whilst she quietly looked about for a button to replace the terrible loss. She had none it appeared in the room, so she went up-stairs; but May producing one from her work-box, asked if she might not have the pleasure of being of use to him, in such a sweetly submissive tone as brought him immediately to his senses, and he gratefully accepted her offer. He sat down and extended his arm; she placed herself on a low ottoman beside him, and began her task.

"James," said she, looking up at him when she had placed the first stitch, shaking back the long ringlets which had fallen forward as she stooped her head; "I am very sorry I spoke so petulantly to you last night. It was wrong and ungrateful after all your kindness to me; but I did not mean it. I don't want you to believe it; I am a naughty, self-willed little girl, but you must have patience with me, and forgive me."

This time he was quite deceived, and his eyes sparkled with triumph as he heard her confession, and saw her beautiful face turned up towards him. She read their expression, and

her anger had nearly betrayed her; but he did not observe it.

"Oh, I thought you would learn to estimate me properly in time," said he, "I will not make protestations; let my actions answer for me. I will not say that I was not a little provoked last night at your injustice," he added, as he remembered his own words and tone of voice; "I am a little hasty, I believe, and quite incapable of disguising my feelings; but it never lasts long with me. I have no malice in my composition,"

"Then you forgive me. I cannot be satisfied without an explicit assurance of your forgiveness," said she, "and all is to be as it was before between us."

"Exactly," was his reply, stroking with his disengaged hand, the beautiful hair which spread over his knee, as she resumed her work.

"There," said she, presently, "now when you are in similar distress always come to me; I shall be most happy to help you, and it is much better than putting yourself in naughty tempers about such trifles," added she with a peculiarly arch smile.

"She certainly is very fascinating," said he

to himself as he gazed at her, "too good for that old fellow, were it not for his money. I have half a mind to marry her myself. Well, well, who knows what may come of it?"

"Wretch," thought she, as she turned away, "if I do not make you pay dearly for every presumptuous look and action, my name is not May Luttrell!"

"I wish you kept a carriage, James," said she to him, as they sat at breakfast. "I do so want to go down to the fête to-morrow at Chiswick; I have heard so much about it!"

"I do not see how you can, May," replied he, "we must get tickets, and I am not sure about having leisure myself."

"Oh, but you must! indeed you must manage it," said May imploringly, "I am sure you might get the tickets if that is all, and just ask for a holiday for my sake. If you you have the least regard for me, James—now do."

"You little tyrant, May," returned he, "well I will try what I can do, it shall not be from want of good will, if I fail. I wonder what you have been thinking of, Ann;" added he reproachfully to his sister, "the coffee tastes

as if you had washed all the dirty dishes in it; do for mercy's sake throw it away, and make me something fit to drink."

"Let me try, James," suggested May, "I always used to make my uncle's, and he said I did it very well."

"Ay do, May; upon my word, you are the most useful clever girl I ever met with; and worth twenty of the town bred young ladies, who can do nothing but work canvass puppies, and play trumpery polkas."

May laughed, and proceeded to make the coffee with her utmost skill, determined to please her cousin, and having an idea, that one of the most effectual means of captivating a man's heart, is to be very attentive to his personal comfort, and little peculiarities of taste and fancy.

He went off in time to the counting-house, and she, as she sat down to her needle-work, reviewed with much self-exultation the steps which she had that morning taken.

It is sad indeed, when a mind generous, candid, and upright by nature, is thus warped and distorted, by the influence of evil company, and bad example. Had May been told twelve-

months ago, what her present plans and schemes would be, she would not have believed the prophecy. Little had she thought as she sat in her uncle's old library, quietly engrossed by her plain needle-work, or her antiquated studies, that she would engage in such a pursuit as now occupied her thoughts. That whilst intending to bestow her hand upon one man, for the sake of the wealth she should thus secure, she should deliberately resolve to win the heart of another, for the gratification of her revenge. It was true that Wildey deserved nothing better—that his own schemes against her were such as merited even a severer punishment; this was not the part of the question which it became her to settle; it was not for her to decide whether *he* deserved this treatment, but whether it was worthy of herself, whether it was becoming in a woman, or consistant with christian duty.

On all this she thought not at all; she only considered the best measures for carrying out her intentions, and securing herself, as she imagined, from future risk, to which she fancied his plans would expose her.

When her cousin returned in the evening, he told her with triumph, that he believed he had

arranged everything for an excursion to Chiswick. He had got the tickets; he had secured a holiday; he had engaged a carriage.

"De ightful," cried May, clapping her hands, "I hope it is a handsome carriage, James, for I will not put up with a shabby turn-out!"

"The carriage is well enough, a little old-fashioned, I believe, but not shabby; I will tell you how I settled it. When I asked Mr. Cameron's leave for a holiday to morrow, he enquired where I was going, and on hearing it, he offered his barouche for our use. What do you think of that?"

"I will tell you when I have seen it. The colour of the carriage, the look of the servants, and the sort of horses will have a great deal to do with my opinion on the subject."

"I meant how would you like it?"

"I should like it best with prancing fiery chesnuts, with long manes and tails; I could not be happy in a yellow carriage, nor enjoy myself if drawn by sober brown horses."

"I believe it is yellow," observed Miss Wildey.

"Then don't expect me to go in it!" exclaimed May, "I could not think of such a thing!"

"Nonsense, May!" exclaimed Wildey, "I thought you would have been pleased with my arrangement, pray don't be foolish."

"As if I were in earnest?" returned she, "really I am extremely obliged both to you and Mr. Cameron, and I have no doubt of enjoying myself excessively."

The morning came, the carriage arrived at the door, and Mr. Cameron arrived in it; he had no idea of sending the young lady on an excursion of pleasure, and remaining behind himself. May had not expected this; nor was she in the least aware, that she was still more indebted to Mr. Cameron's liberality; for Wildey did not tell her that he had purchased the tickets which were to secure her this pleasure. He thought the same caprice which made her refuse the chain, might induce her to decline accepting such a favour.

As to Miss Wildey, she went where she was taken, and did as she was bid, without asking questions, or making objections. She had been too long dependant on her brother's will, to dare to have a mind, or a thought of her own. There was not a brighter nor a fairer face in all the throng which crowded the road that day,

than May Luttrell's, as she sat smiling and chatting beside Mr. Cameron; for having found he intended to accompany them, she made up her mind at once to repay him in smiles and graciousness for the loan of his carriage.

These lovely smiles, produced an effect on the merchant's heart, quite intoxicating — he could hardly believe in his good fortune, and yet every look of hers seemed to confirm Wildey's tale, that she was strongly prepossessed in his favour.

When they reached that part of the road where the throng of carriages began; where mounted policemen by desperate efforts, scarce restrained impatient coachmen from breaking the line, and driving on at random; where prancing horses seemed about to put their proud heads in the barouche; and omnibuses and pony-carriages, cabs and four-in-hands, phaetons and broughams seemed all jammed together in two hopeless, helpless, never ending, and never progressing strings, May's ecstacy was extreme. Miss Wildey was frightened out of her wits, and in her blank amazement actually propounded an idea, namely that they had better all get out and walk; but nobody noticing the suggestion,

she again sank into silent terror, and contented herself, and gave vent to her feelings, by squeezing the handle of her parasol, as if it were her last hold on life. But May laughed and clapped her hands, and enjoyed the confusion, and wished it were twenty times greater; and was afraid it would be over too soon, without their meeting with any adventure.

"Your horses are much too steady" cried she to Mr. Cameron. "I wish you had a frisky pair, which would curvet and prance; oh, how I should like such a charming pony-phaeton as that. only see those cream-coloured ponies; there is no risk, no danger in such a huge machine as this barouche; a little fairy-like carriage in which one would expect every moment to be crushed: and yet always escape safely, that is what I should like."

"You prefer excitement and danger, then?" enquired Mr Cameron; "that is very well at your age, but I am too old to enjoy them. I look for quiet, safety, and peace."

"Oh, nonsense! you think you do, because you never tried the other—that is all; you shut yourself up in your counting-house, until you fancy you like nothing else; but you would

soon find your mistake if you were to try a little change, Mr. Cameron—nobody really likes being buried alive."

"I can fancy some changes which would be pleasing," replied he; "but having the pole of an omnibus through the panel of my carriage would not be one of them."

May's delight did not cease when they reached the gardens. The beauty of the lawns and trees, the brightness of the sunshine, the military music, the crowds of well-dressed people walking here and there and every where, threw her into a perfect paroxysm of happiness. She had never witnessed, never fancied such a scene—the wildest imaginations in which she had ever indulged could not have conveyed a quarter of its gaiety and novelty. For a time she forgot herself in genuine frank admiration; but after a while, the contrast of her own plain dress and simple bonnet, with all the waving feathers, fluttering laces, and glistening silks around her, made her unhappy. She envied those who could afford to sweep about in such finery—people whom she imagined to be all vastly more important, and of course more happy than

herself, and her smiles grew fainter, her to less joyous as she reflected on this point.

Wildey was watching her as closely as] Cameron, and with rather more penetrati The latter only supposed her to be tired, a after a considerable exercise of patient watchi succeeded in securing her a seat; but the for had a juster appreciation of her grave loo and resolved not to allow so favourable opportunity to pass unimproved.

"It is a fine thing to be rich, May, is it no said he, softly. "This is the place to te us the value of wealth, and the many enjoyme it brings. How I should like to see my pr cousin appearing amongst this throng with the *éclat* which fashion and dress could giv her beauty! Well, well, we will hope sc time or other for better things."

She did not answer, and continued draw lines on the ground with the point of parasol.

"You are exhausted," continued he alc "your spirits wear you out."

"I am dreadfully thirsty," replied she, " really can scarcely speak."

With gallant alacrity Mr. Cameron immediately prepared to get her an ice, and when this had been successfully accomplished, he began to think it time to return home. As no one opposed his wishes, the carriage was summoned, and they took their road to London.

May Luttrell was silent during their drive, and as Mr. Cameron was tired and sleepy from the heat, he found her as agreeable in her present mood as she had been in her more lively one. She was thinking. It seemed to her that, of all that vast throng she had just seen, she alone was insignificant and unattended to—she saw other women smiling and chatting with groups of elegant young men—*she* knew no one but her cousin and Mr. Cameron. This was mortifying in the extreme. She would have liked to be the point of attraction for all eyes—to be followed by a crowd of admirers, to be courted, caressed and imitated. And she would be so—she had the means in her power, she would use them without scruple; and the result of her excursion to Chiswick was a stronger resolution than ever to accept Mr. Cameron's hand, and enter, by his wealth and her own beauty, the

charming circle of fashion, to which by no other means could she hope to attain.

Ten days only had passed since Grace Ashton's wedding, but these ten days had made an important change in May's ideas and prospects. During this time, she had repeatedly seen Mr. Cameron, and had quite decided on her future line of life. The engrossing nature of her present plans had tended to banish recollections of her friends the Ashtons; but one morning she suddenly resolved to seek Grace, and see how she got on in her schemes of happy poverty. She was tired of the inanity of Miss Wildey as a companion, and very desirous of enjoying a little real and equal society—of being with some one to whom she could talk without disguise, and from whom she should receive opinions which she believed sincere and affectionate.

Full of these wishes, she started for Queen Square, without telling her cousins anything about her intentions, and quite regardless of any degree of anxiety which a protracted absence on her part might occasion. She meant to get Jane to go with her in an omnibus, which she

knew would convey her to the door of Mrs. Dunsford's new home, they having taken a small house on the eastern side of the city, conveniently situated with regard to Harry's daily journeys to the counting-house, though at a very considerable distance from Grace's family.

Her journey was fortunate; for although Jane in her new capacity of housekeeper and mistress, would not venture to desert her charge for so long a period without her father's knowledge, it was a holiday with George, who readily volunteered to escort May on her expedition, feeling equally proud of having such a beautiful companion under his care, and of knowing so much of London as to be able to guide her right.

Under his direction, they succeeded in making their way to the omnibus, and meeting with neither accident nor hindrance of any kind out of the common course of events, nor so much as seeing one handsome young man who might interest May's curiosity, they reached the long row of small new houses where George said Grace lived.

The little servant girl told them her mistress

was out, but she expected her home every minute, so they sat down in the small dining-room to await her return. May surveyed the furniture and fitting up of the room. It was very plain and simple—very unlike what she had pictured to herself should be the aspect of a similar apartment in her own house on some future occasion. But she had not above five minutes to meditate on this subject, when the house-door opened, and she heard Grace's step in the passage. The two visitors, all impatience to see her, ran out, and so startled her in her joyful surprise, that she nearly dropped the basket which contained the produce of her marketing.

"My dearest May," she exclaimed, "oh! how good of you to come! And how did you manage it, and how long have you been here?" were questions rapidly uttered by the young wife, whilst May in return only exclaimed:

"How well you are looking, Grace! And are you happy? and how do you like your house and your husband?" and twenty other ejaculations which could certainly not be answered then, even had it been possible ever to return them an answer at all.

When these first ebullitions of pleasure had subsided, Grace made her visitors sit down again, whilst she went to give some instructions to her maid-servant, and then returned at leisure to have a comfortable chat.

"I had planned spending the afternoon at my father's," said she. "Harry was to meet me there, and take me home in the evening; and as I cannot change now, on account of him, you shall go back with me; otherwise, I should have kept you, May, all night; for we have fitted up a spare bed-room, I assure you."

"In that case," cried George. "I shall go home at once, Grace, I shall walk back, it is no distance for *me;* and you and May can come when you please. I am sure Jane will require a little notice, or may be she will not give us dinner enough."

This was agreed to, and George started on his return, leaving the two young ladies together.

"Now tell me truly, Grace," said May, with great earnestness; "do you really find it answer; are you happy being poor?"

"Happy with Harry; oh yes, who could help that; but then you know it has been for

so very short a time, that we can hardly say, whether I have fairly tried it yet, so far as management and economy go. I know just what we have to spend, and I hope to make him comfortable, then I shall be sure to be happy myself. And so, May, you came down here on a voyage of discovery to see whether I was miserable or not?"

"Exactly. I expected of course to find you in a state of complete wretchedness."

"Is it not a nice little house, May?"

"Yes, for a small one, very nice!"

"And when Harry comes home, and we sit down here together, you cannot imagine how we enjoy ourselves!"

"Yes, I wanted to see you together, I forgot he was out. And he really behaves well to you, does he? and on your fortnight's experience of marriage you would recommend it to others. Eh?" said May very gravely.

"If they could all have such husbands as Harry, he is so good;" said Grace, with sparkling eyes. "But May, are you thinking of matrimony that you come here to ask such questions?"

"Oh, yes, I intend to marry, if ever anybody

asks me. That is anybody rich enough, for in spite of all you say, Grace, there is no temptation to me in your house or prospects. It may suit you very well; you are so good, and clever, and gay, that I have no doubt you will get on very well; but I should never do for it. I should worry myself to death with over anxiety, or else I should neglect it all, and let economy and housekeeping take their own way."

"So you still intend to be rich, May?"

"Yes, and I am not without an idea as to how I may secure my wishes!"

"Indeed."

"Yes, but you must not tell any one, if I trust you, or at least, nobody but Harry, of course you will tell him. I mean to marry Mr. Cameron!"

"Mr. Cameron!"

"Exactly."

"My dear May," exclaimed Grace, laughing, "what a face of gravity you put on to announce the scheme; any one would think you are really in earnest!"

"Then they would think quite right, for so I am!"

Grace only shook her head with an incredulous smile.

"I assure you, I mean what I say. James Wildey tells me that Mr. Cameron wants a wife, and that he is very much charmed with me, though I do not need James' penetration to discover that. *He* wants a young woman for a wife—I, a rich man for my husband, we suit exactly; so what should prevent our marrying?"

"And is it possible—are you engaged to him?"

"No, not engaged because the late Mrs. Cameron has not been dead quite eight months yet; but that is to follow by and bye."

"Oh, May! May! how can you think of such a thing; to sell your hand for gold!"

"Why it seems very shocking, I dare say; put in that light especially; but after all, when you come to think, it is not so bad. He is a nice old man; amiable and kind, you must allow."

"Oh, yes, Mr. Cameron is very good, but the disparity of years is too great; you cannot love him as a wife should."

"I do not pretend to be in love with him, but then neither am I with any one else."

"Nor must you ever be—you will never know what it is to have a sincere true, disinterested, equal affection, such as—" she stopped.

"Such as you feel for Harry—very well, I can do without it; but I shall have a great deal to compensate for it—a great deal which is worth more to me, than the most romantic love."

"Oh, May, don't be in a hurry—take time for deliberation—consider what a risk you run in thus giving your hand without your heart."

"I do not see any such great risk; Mr. Cameron will be very kind to me, I have no doubt, and he likes me very much already: where is the danger then; what is there so shocking in it? It is true he is forty years older than I am, but we may suit each other for all that."

"No, no, May, wealth and grandeur cannot compensate for the absence of domestic peace, but they will place you in a situation of greater trial and temptation. The more eminent your station, the more your beauty and talents will

expose you; and, oh! May, if when too late your heart should meet with one whom it could love with true womanly affection, think what your despair will be if you have sold your hand."

"But, Grace, I hope you do not think me so wicked as to be in any danger of compromising my own honour, or of betraying my husband, be he old or young."

"I hope not, but who can say for certain, that they shall stand in the hour of trial and temptation? It is not an easy thing, dear May, to resist the voice of passion, nor is it a wise thing to place ourselves in situations of danger, or else why are we taught to pray 'lead us not into temptation?'"

"I do not fear for myself, Grace. I respect Mr. Cameron greatly, and I respect myself also, and both these feelings must keep me from such dangers as you allude to. My beauty as you call it, may make me admired, but it will never, *shall* never be my ruin."

"I know that in some things you have a high sense of honour, May; but do you think it quite consistent with this, to engage to love a man for

whom you cannot feel a true affection. Are you acting, are you going to act towards him quite candidly, quite openly, quite fairly?"

May crimsoned as she remembered her compact with her wily cousin, and did not answer for a minute or two, then resolutely shaking off her embarrassment she replied as calmly as she could.

"I do not mean to be unfair or dishonourable, I will be a good wife!" but changing to a more lively tone she added: "but after all, you know, Grace, I am not engaged to him yet; and here we two sit gravely discussing the proprieties of a line of conduct which perhaps I may never adopt, for a hundred things may happen to prevent this marriage."

"Oh, May! if you only knew the happiness of affection truly returned, the delight of feeling honest pride in your husband's worth, reliance on his love, and perfect dependance on similarity of tastes and sentiments, you would not forfeit such felicity for the world."

"That is all very true, but who will guarantee me that I shall ever have such good fortune? It is not every woman who can love, that meets with a suitable husband; and as I cannot live with

my cousins for ever, and when I leave them, have not the slightest chance of seeing another man in the country, it would be a hopeless speculation to wait until I met with any one better worth marrying than Mr. Cameron."

"Well, I will say no more about it, May; but remember that I am not silent because I approve of your plans, or think you in a way to be happy; only because I do not want to quarrel with you."

"I shall never quarrel with you, you dear good Grace; and when I am Mrs. Cameron, I will often have you with me, and help you on in every way I can; I shall not forget your kindness."

"No, no, when you are Mrs. Cameron I shall never see you, there will be an end of our friendship; you will be much too grand and rich to know a poor clerk's wife, living in this remote corner of London. But if you are really happy I shall not mind that!"

"As if it would make any difference to me, or to my love for you, whether we are either of us rich or poor. I do not care about rank in those I love, and so long as I am wealthy and happy, I could very well bear to have friends

who are the latter only; you shall love me still Grace, indeed you shall."

"We shall see, but I fear you will find the rules of society must be observed, and you will be forced to associate with the great and fashionable when you are great and fashionable yourself. I hope you will always remember with kindness, but without regret, the evenings we spent together in Queen Square."

May's only answer was an affectionate kiss. A short silence was followed by a change of topic, and the young friends chatted amicably about many subjects. Grace dwelt with delight on the pleasant week she had enjoyed at Windsor, the delightful rambles in the Park and by the river, and all the other treats of those few happy days; and May listened with half a sigh to think that such pleasures never would be hers. They went all over the house together, which though very small, was really convenient and pretty, and they talked over their plans for the future, and a hundred other interesting topics until it was time to start for their expedition to Queen Square.

They found Jane anxiously expecting them, having been exerting herself in every way to

make her house-keeping appear to advantage, and to show how steady and thoughtful she had become.

May once more spent a pleasant afternoon amongst her friends, but she did not like to stay very late as she remembered that her cousin had not the least idea where she was gone, and might possibly be uneasy at her long absence. Both Grace and Mr. Ashton scolded her for her thoughtlessness, in going out and leaving them in that way; but she only laughed and said they must be donkeys if they could not guess where she was. By and bye, Robert escorted her home, and as she entered the house, after wishing him good night, she reflected on the happy day she had spent, and the degree of comfort which her friends enjoyed. Her reverie was cut short, as she was slowly ascending the stairs, by her cousin coming out with a light in his hand; the sudden glare so dazzled her eyes that she could scarcely look at him, and she did not observe the air of anger, alarm and surprise, which marked his countenance.

"Is that you, May?" he exclaimed, "where in all the world have you been? Ann said she knew nothing of you, and yet you have been

absent the whole day, and it is now nine o'clock."

"Exactly."

"Exactly what?" said he, hastily.

"Anything you like. It is exactly I come in; or it is exactly the whole day that I have been out; or it is exactly nine o'clock, for I heard it strike as I knocked at the door. All these are undeniable truths."

"I really think, May, when you have treated us in this way, you owe some explanation of your conduct. I insist on knowing where you have been."

"I hope you will succeed in finding out, then, for I shall not tell you when you speak in that tone; I wonder you have not learned by this time, James, that I am not to be ruled by a loud voice and an autocrat sort of manner."

"Silly girl!" he replied, taking care, however, to soften his tone, "why will you try to vex me in this way; you cannot imagine how you have alarmed me?"

"That was not at all my intention, I only wanted to please myself."

"But now, my dear May, as your guardian and protector for the time, and as being re-

sponsible for your safety, indeed, I must know where you have been, and I cannot allow you to run these risks again."

"What risks?" said she, in the most provokingly comic tone.

"I am no match for you in words," said he with affected humility, "but I believe I have far more interest in your welfare than you have in my comfort, or else you would not go on tormenting me so. Do tell me where you have been?"

"Where I have been; let me see, in an omnibus, I think," pretending to be reflecting deeply as she spoke, "and in the streets, too."

"What streets?"

"Now, positively, I cannot pretend to tell you all the streets I have been through. Like the princesses in fairy tales, I went along a great great way, and saw a great, great many things, and after many wanderings and some expense, and after escaping, as it appears, from some terrible risks—"

"Have you really—what risks?" interrupted he, eagerly.

"Those to which you alluded, just now, I know nothing of them, but took them on your

word ; after escaping these risks, as I said, I arrived here safely, just at nine o'clock, to greet the eyes of my beloved cousins."

Wildey walked impatiently up and down the room. May was so provoking, but it was no use getting angry with her ; she was not to be managed by cross words, so he restrained his vexation, and sitting down beside her, where she had thrown herself on the sofa, he took hold of her hand, and said in a tone, at once imploring and affectionate :

"If you had the least idea how uneasy you have made me, by your mysterious absence, I know you would be sorry, because I really believe my cousin May has some regard for me. At least, I would not vex her, as she has done me, and then laugh at it, for anything."

"And you have been really frightened, James ?"

"Of course I have, to find you gone."

"Well, to tell you the truth, I never thought about that, I went out because I wanted to go, and never remembered, until I began to think of coming home, that perhaps you might be surprised, not to say alarmed."

"Thoughtless girl," said he, twisting his finger in one of the long, shining curls which fell down over her neck and shoulders; "will you ever become steady and considerate?"

"And what have you done to find me, with all this great alarm of yours, James; have you been to the detective police, or what?"

"What could I do? I was not home till late, and then—"

"And then you were hungry," said she, fixing her laughing eyes on his face, "and wanted your dinner. Now, if *you* had been lost, and I had been frightened for you, I should have taken active measures for your recovery."

"Of what kind, May?"

"I should have sent to all the police-stations, and to where the magistrates are sitting, under the full expectation of finding you there; and if this had failed, should have entertained the completest conviction that you were gone to America."

"Impertinent little monkey that you are," replied he, laughing, "I shall never be able to manage you."

"There's many a true word spoken in jest, James, and I suspect that is one of them. I am not easily managed, I believe."

"Well, but where have you been?"

"Well, but what have you done with all this great alarm of yours — what, nothing? absolutely frightened out of all your senses, and done nothing; not even sent to Queen Square to ask the Ashtons if they knew of me?"

"The Ashtons—what business have you there?"

"No business, perhaps—but pleasure, certainly; a great deal of pleasure I always hav there."

"And have you been there all day, then?"

"I went first of all to Mrs. Dunsford's."

"And where does she live, pray?"

"Oh, I cannot tell, exactly; Alfred Place, number nine, somewhere near Stratford-le-Bow, I believe."

Wildey started upright on the sofa where he was lounging by his cousin's side, and looking her full in the face, exclaimed:

"You don't mean to say that you, May Luttrell, have been all the way to Stratford-le-

Bow to see any Grace Dunsford! you are joking, surely?"

"No, I am not—I did go there this morning. I told you I had been in an omnibus; and you don't suppose I went in one to Queen Square. Indeed, I did not know there were any passed that way. What is there so horrible in the fact, as to make you stare in that dreadful way, with your whiskers all standing on end, and your eyebrows taking the shape of a letter U wrong side upwards. The process seemed simple and natural enough to me."

"Yes, May, because you do not know the danger to which a beautiful young woman exposes herself, when she ventures about without a protector. But take my word for it, and do not repeat these expeditions."

"Your imaginary dangers to unprotected females, however beautiful, do not alarm me in the least; first, because I did not meet with anything of the sort, and secondly, because I was not wholly unprotected, having not only my own presence of mind and courage, but one of my most devoted lovers to take care of me."

How May did laugh as she saw the per-

plexed despairing look with which her cousin listened to this extraordinary assertion! He was quite angry at her mirth, and again got up, and paced the room, whilst she sat still on the sofa, indulging in one peal of laughter after another, and growing the more merry, in proportion as he grew more wrathful. He tried to control, or conceal his annoyance, finding that it only excited her derision, and was not in the least likely to influence her conduct, and when he had conquered his feelings sufficiently to speak with calmness, he advanced and stood before her.

"Now, my dear May, do listen seriously to me," said he, imploringly.

"Ay, and sleepily, too," said she with a great yawn, "upon my word, James, I want to go to bed; and I recommend you to put off the rest of your very wise, witty, and well-timed expostulation till to-morrow. It would give you time to consider and arrange your arguments, and me to recover my strength, and get over my yawns. So, good night."

"But, May, one word more—" exclaimed he, detaining her hand.

"Not one, except good night, on pain of my high displeasure."

"You are a terrible tyrant, May, and I know you will always get your own way with me—I am only too indulgently disposed towards you. Good-night."

"I dare say you are," said May to herself, as she sat down in her own room. "Fancy James piquing himself on being too indulgent—he who is trying to bind me mind and body in fetters of his own forging. Ah, my good cousin, if you expect to shut me up here to see nobody, and talk to nobody, except those whom you choose, you are very much mistaken indeed."

CHAPTER V.

CELIA. You have simply misused our sex in your love prate!—AS YOU LIKE IT.

THE next morning at breakfast, Wildey renewed his expostulations to his cousin on her yesterday's excursion. She listened to him with profound gravity and perfect silence, offering neither comment nor opposition; so that he was as much at a loss as to what impression he made as he had been the night before. His lecture was interrupted by the arrival of the post, which brought with several letters to him, one to May herself.

Whilst he looked over his own in silence, she read hers, and when she had concluded it—and it did not take very long, she turned round to

him, and said, as if she had been announcing the most common-place fact:

"My uncle wants me home immediately, James, so I shall not have an opportunity of shewing my attention to your wishes. I must go to-morrow."

"Home!" exclaimed he, amazed. "Impossible! you cannot be in earnest."

"You may read that," said she, tossing the letter on the table before him; "and you will see what he says."

He took it up and quickly ran through the few lines. It only stated that as his housekeeper was ill, and a friend was coming to see him, it was absolutely necessary that May should come home immediately.

Miss Wildey began in feeble tones to express her sorrow; James seemed endeavouring to swallow his disappointment along with his coffee, which he hastily drank up very hot, and without sugar.

"It will never do," he said at last, "you cannot go."

"I shall pack up my things to day, and set out to-morrow," replied she.

"But Mr. Cameron," suggested her cousin, "it is such short notice for him."

"He is not coming with me that I know of," said she, coolly; "what has he got to do with it, then?"

May continued to eat her breakfast as usual, but her cousins seemed to have lost their appetites. Mis Wildey soon left the table, her brother sat in deep and silent meditation for a long time; at length, he said doubtfully:

"Perhaps he might follow you though."

She made no answer, but presently got up from the table, and walking to the window, said:

"If it is not too much trouble, cousin James, I should be obliged if you would enquire about the times of the trains. I shall go early to-morrow."

"You seem to take it very coolly," said he, looking round at her as she stood there. "It almost appears that you like to leave us."

"I am only endeavouring to imitate your stoicism," replied she. "*You* think merely of what Mr. Cameron will say or do; so if my presence or absence is so indifferent to you,

you can hardly expect me to show any violent symptoms of despair. I go from where my presence is a matter of indifference, to where it is valued and demanded."

He looked at her earnestly, then went close up to her, and said:

"So you think, May, I am glad to part with you, do you?"

"No, I only think you do not care about it," said she, turning away her head.

"Then you think very wrong: I shall miss you every day, and shall not know what to do without you. I must go with you to Lincolnshire, I think, to take care of you on the journey."

"You will do no such thing," said she hastily, "I shall go alone, now get away to your office. I don't believe you care an atom about me, and if you miss me, it will be a pleasant sensation. No, no, cousin James, you cannot deceive me; you do not love me!"

"You are very unjust, May—what have I done but try to benefit you in every way possible; have I not been scheming for your elevation, and anxious to keep you from all mischief? And when you go, I will not forget you, as you

shall find. But perhaps your uncle will spare you again soon—who is this friend coming to see him ?"

"I am sure I don't know the least in the world. But I do not expect I shall ever come back, I shall die of *ennui* at home !"

"No, no, keep up your spirits, May; you shall come back to be Mrs. Cameron yet. We will not be baffled thus !"

"Impossible, I shall marry this friend of my uncle's. He is most likely coming for that."

"Eh ! no, he must be some old man !" cried Wildey quite alarmed.

"I do not see that, but old or young he is coming to be married to me, I feel perfectly certain."

"But did your uncle ever tell you so? or why, what makes you talk of it?"

"I cannot give you my reasons, and I must go and write a note to say farewell to my dear friend Grace Dunsford, as I shall not see her again. So I cannot stay talking to you any more." And with these words, May ran off to laugh in her own room, at the evident alarm she had raised in her cousin's mind, and to sigh

at the dull prospect before her of a return
Lincolnshire, with but small expectation
finding her home much enlivened by the visit
of whom her uncle spoke.

She was resolved to go herself to Que
Square, if possible, to say good bye to her frien
there, but she found so many little things to
and arrangements to make up-stairs, preparat
to her journey, that the morning slipped aw
without her knowing how. Just about luncheo
time, she was startled by a loud knock at t
door, and going down with some curiosity to
who the visitor was, found Mr. Cameron alo
in the drawing-room.

When the first greeting was over, and th
were seated, Mr. Cameron said:

"I understood from Wildey that you w
about to leave London!"

She assented quietly.

"I wished to see you first," continued he.

She thanked him calmly, looking straight
him with an air of composure which grea
assisted him in speech. Had *she* been e
barrassed *he* would certainly have lost his s
possession.

"I am very sorry you are obliged to go away so soon, I have not known you long. Shall you not come back again?"

"No, I think not."

"But is that decision a matter of choice or necessity!"

"Not choice, certainly. I am in no hurry to go," replied May, looking down. The idea flashed on her mind that he was going to propose for her, and she felt at the moment that he had better not.

"Lincolnshire, I think?" said he interrogatively.

"Where I live? yes!"

Another long silence ensued, May took up some needle-work and began to apply herself to it, trusting that her visitor in process of time would either speak or go away; he sat still, looking earnestly at a picture which hung on the other side of the room. This pause lasted for more than five minutes; she grew impatient, jerked her thread and broke it, then threw down a reel of cotton, and in trying to save it upset her work-box, and scattered the contents on the carpet.

This incident afforded an agreeable diversion;

they both began to pick up the reels, scissors and sundries which were rolling on the floor; and May had some difficulty in suppressing her inclination to laugh as she watched the good merchant crawling on the carpet at her feet.

"Is that all?" said he, as he restored to her a handful of small articles, all tangled together in great confusion. "You will never be able to put these right again, shall you?"

"I shall try," replied she, demurely.

"Are you very patient?" enquired he, gravely.

"Extremely so, when I am not worried."

"And good-tempered, I am sure," added Mr. Cameron.

She nodded and smiled.

"Well then, I trust to your patience and good temper to listen to me now. Do not think me precipitate, or condemn me for want of due decorum. If you are going away to-morrow, you know I must speak to-day. Will you hear me?" His manner was nervous and agitated, but May, feeling that she must listen some time, and might as well attend now, answered with a degree of composure and a look of unsuspicious innocence, which tended to soothe and give him courage.

"Miss Luttrell," continued he, "my object is simple enough, and as I am a plain man, excuse my expressing myself plainly. Will you marry me? I know I am older than you, and I feel that I am quite unworthy of you, with your beauty and youth; but if I could make you happy as my wife, I should certainly secure my own felicity. You should have everything which the heart of woman could desire—you should neither be crossed nor contradicted; you should have as many jewels and gold chains as you could wear; you should have settlements which might content a duchess. Will you be my wife?"

She did not answer, and he became embarrassed by her silence. She hesitated; it was all in her power now for good or for evil—her fate was in her own hands. Oh! to have one minute's glance into the future, to see what the result would be! Such was her thought; she wished to do what would best secure her own happiness, and she trembled at the thought of risking all, either by advance or retreat.

"Will you not answer me?" said the gentleman, taking her hand in his; "or must I consider your silence as a refusal—an over-

throw of all my hopes? I was presumptuous—"

"One moment—one little minute!" exclaimed May, covering her face with her other hand.

"Nay, I will not hurry you, sweet May," replied her suitor; "one minute—five—ten, if you please. I will wait your convenience."

"Five minutes," she answered, almost mechanically.

Mr. Cameron took out his watch, and sat with an air of tender solemnity, holding the time-piece in one hand and her fingers in the other, whilst the young lady averted her face and tried to think. Various and opposite images danced across her imagination. The thought of Grace and her young, cheerful, affectionate husband, and then a vision of a splendid barouche with prancing horses and liveried attendants,—a recollection of her cousin James, and his sinister expression, together with her promise to him, quickly followed by a desire for an opera-box and a diamond necklace—a memory of a marshy field in Lincolnshire, and a dull dark room in her uncle's house concluded her reverie, and decided her choice; and she was just about to make her answer, when she

was seized with an almost irresistible impulse to laugh, as she turned her head and saw her suitor's business-like air as he noted the hands of his watch slowly progressing towards the desired point.

"Miss Luttrell," said he, raising his eyes, "the time of my probation is over, end my suspense, I entreat you."

"Mr. Cameron, are you sure that my hand will make you happy?"

"Perfectly certain—it is your happiness for which I care."

"Then it is yours, on certain conditions; you must excuse my speaking in a business-like way; but there are some preliminaries to be arranged."

"Certainly—only name your conditions."

"First, that you do not ask me to live in the city—my health would not stand it. I must have a house in the west end, on which condition I will consent to reside in London."

"You shall choose your own house, Miss Luttrell, I will give you *carte blanche* on the subject."

"Secondly, that my uncle approves of your

proposals; I cannot marry without his sanction, as I am not of age yet."

"Right, perfectly correct and right, I will write to him on the subject by to-night's post!"

"Thirdly, that in the arrangement of an establishment, the choice of horses, carriages, furniture and all such necessaries of life, you will allow me the exercise of my own taste and judgment."

"Of course, I am convinced that it is perfection."

"Lastly, that you will always secure me a good opera-box."

"Ah—but if you have a box you will want to go to it?—"

"Certainly!"

"But I think an opera stupid, and the ballet indecent."

"If you hesitate" said May half-rising from the sofa, "I am gone!"

"No, no, do not go! you shall have everything you wish," cried he eagerly.

She turned to him with a smile, and held out her hand.

"It shall be yours," said she.

His rapture and eloquence must be imagined.

As, however, she did not particularly delight in expressions of admiration and affection, to which she could make no corresponding return, she soon brought the discourse back to a matter of fact view of the subject, to enquiries as to what he intended to do under the circumstances; and plans for the future which had far more of reality than romance in them.

It was certain that she must go home to Lincolnshire, and Mr. Cameron seemed decidedly of opinion that it was the very best arrangement that could have been made. He told her he could not marry under four months, though at his age, he did not think it necessary to wait longer. But respect for the late Mrs. Cameron would prevent an earlier fulfilment of their engagement; however much this delay might annoy him, it must be submitted to.

She perfectly coincided with him. It would be quite early enough if their marriage took place in November; in the meantime, she supposed she should see him occasionally, whilst resident at her uncle's.

"Certainly if he could spare time from his business, and if her uncle approved, and would receive him at his house."

Oh there could be no real doubt as to her uncle. He never cared what she did; and would, she was sure be glad to have her well married. He hoped Mr. Luttrell would not be offended at his having ventured to address her first on the subject; it was unavoidable under the circumstances, but he meant no disrespect to him.

May was as ready to answer for his complacency in this matter, as on any other, her uncle was not the sort of man to take offence about points of etiquette; he was very kind and good-natured, and always let her do as she pleased.

Before Miss Wildey returned, for she had been out shopping all the morning, Mr. Cameron retired, leaving May to take refuge in her own room, and reflect on what she had done.

The good merchant went home in a satisfactory frame of mind, and he would in all probability have communicated to his confidential adviser the success of his application, had not May at parting extracted a solemn promise that he would keep it a secret, until her uncle's consent should be given; a course of proceeding which he supposed to originate in dutiful regard

to Mr. Luttrell, but which really had its motive in a wicked desire to torment her cousin James as much as possible. The successful lover therefore gave vent to his feelings, by going at once to a jeweller's and making a selection of valuable bracelets and rings, to be presented, at proper intervals, to the fair object of his affection.

May Luttrell's farewell note to Grace Dunsford confided to her the important bargain she had just concluded, and she was also compelled to compress within the same sheet of paper all her adieux to her family, for she had no time to go in person to Queen Square.

The first question which James Wildey asked on his return home that evening, was whether Mr. Cameron had been there in the course of the day. His sister who alone was present, answered quietly and simply in the negative; for she had not seen him herself, and was quite ignorant that any one else had.

"Very odd," thought he impatiently, "I fully anticipated that he would have made his proposals; if May goes away without, and he loses sight of her, perhaps after all my pains it may come to nothing. Especially if this old uncle

of hers is really providing her with some other lover."

He fidgetted about all the evening, unwilling to say anything to his cousin about his expectations, lest he should prove wrong, and yet anxious that she should mention the subject herself.

The eight o'clock post brought May a note, which he had no doubt came from Mr. Cameron, and he sat in a state of impatient excitement whilst she read it over; watching her face with more earnestness than good breeding. The envelope contained several leaves; it did not look like the merchant's hand, as well as he could judge; but she seemed rather affected by the contents, he plainly observed her eyes fill with tears, which she endeavoured to conceal or disperse, and her colour varied a good deal whilst reading it.

Still, she said nothing as to the writer; but folding it up, and replacing it in its envelope, she continued for some time thoughtful and silent.

At length he could bear it no longer, but by way of introducing the subject, he said, "Your letter seems to have affected your spirits, May! I hope it contained no bad news."

"Thank you, no. It was from Grace Dunsford."

"Grace Dunsford, again; upon my word, I am sick of that name."

"It is fortunate then for your constitution that I am going to-morrow, where my correspondence with her, will cause you no such uneasy sensations; for you will hear nothing more of either of us."

"That is not true, in the first place, for I shall hear of you of course; and it would be no consolation, if it were true, in the second, as I should be really grieved if *we* were to have no correspondence."

"Then I am sadly afraid that you will have to endure this subject of grief, for I have not the smallest intention of carrying on a correspondence with you."

"Why not, May?"

"I shall have no time; what with talking to my uncle, and mending his stockings—nursing his housekeeper and giving her her gruel—amusing his visitor and receiving his addresses, my hours will be fully occupied from morning to night."

"Oh, I want to know about that man who is coming to you."

"So do I."

"And you have no idea what he his?"

"I understood from my uncle,—he is a man."

"Tiresome girl," exclaimed her cousin, who had expected some information. "But what reason have you to suppose he is coming to marry you?"

"My uncle always said he should provide for me, and I am sure I do not know how else he could do it."

"And who do you suppose him to be, May?"

"The son or nephew of my uncle's bosom friend, and old companion in arms, when he was a captain in the militia. I anticipate seeing a charming young man, with bushy whiskers, polished boots, and a large estate, either in Ireland, or in expectation."

"Did you ever hear of him before, then?"

"No."

"I did not know your uncle had been in the militia, May."

"Nor did I."

"Upon my word, May, what evil spirit possesses you, then, to talk such confounded nonsense?"

"I am only endeavouring to keep up your

spirits, my dear cousin, which I see are depressed by the idea of our parting to-morrow."

"You vex, irritate, and annoy me."

"What, by talking; nay, I beg your pardon; henceforth I am mute as a fish on all possible subjects."

A short silence ensued. He broke it at last, by asking her if she had heard anything of Mr. Cameron.

She continued her needle-work without speaking. He repeated his question, still without procuring any response. He got out of patience, and coming close up to her, said, "Do you intend to give me an answer, or not, May?"

"No," said she, and then closing her lips, with an air, as if nothing would tempt her to open them.

He threw himself down on the sofa by her side, placed his elbows on the table, his chin on both his hands, and sat gazing at her in perplexed and gloomy silence.

He could not manage her in the least, she neither feared his frowns, nor was influenced by his expostulations; she was provoking, tantalising, charming, bewitching; he was divided between an inclination to box her ears, and to

burst out laughing. And she was going away too, without his feeling sure that he should see her again, or have any opportunity of renewing their intercourse. He could very well, with all his love for her, and he was a good deal in love, have borne that she should marry Mr. Cameron, because he then trusted to manage them both; and secure, what was dearer to him than May herself, his own advancement. But he could not endure that she should go off to a distance, with no certainty of again meeting, and he was devoured by jealousy, as to his imaginary rival in Lincolnshire.

Had she only seemed to care about it, it would have been some consolation; but there she sat, as passive, as composed, as demure as a statue, or a nun, without so much as looking at him, or noticing his desperation or vexation.

Had she looked triumphant, or amused, he he might have thought she was acting a part, and hoped she would soon conclude it; had she seemed sorry or concerned, he should have fancied her waywardness arose from loss of spirits, and that would have been compensation to his feelings, but it was none of this which seemed to influence her; he had lost his power,

but yet he had no hopes of recovering it by losing his temper, too.

Half an hour of gloomy silence passed away, which was broken by Miss Wildey looking up at her brother and cousin, as she was lighting a candle to leave the room, and observing gravely that they seemed rather depressed.

May, at this remark, turned her eyes on him, and surveyed him with admirable composure and steadiness of countenance; but she did not utter a syllable.

"I did not think you had been so perfectly hard-hearted; so inconceivably unfeeling, so intolerably unkind, to one who has certainly been trying to the best of his power to please you."

"Really, James, I am tired of these perpetual scenes, reproaches apologies, pardons, &c., &c., as if we were acting an endless farce. Pray leave it off; if you have anything to say or to ask me, say it like a straightforward, outspoken man, and do not put on looks of desponding misery, which do not become you, and provoke me—act like a rational being."

"Well, May, about Mr. Cameron; what have you to say about him."

"Nothing. I am not going to talk about him at all; it was all very well to joke about my marrying him for a little while, but it does not do to carry such things on for a length of time—it is indelicate and improper. I desire the subject may be dropped henceforth. Say nothing either to him or me about it; you have done what you could, I dare say, but any further interference may do harm, and can do no possible good."

He saw she was in earnest, and he dared not contradict her. It was when she spoke thus, her dark eyes flashing with a graver light, the lines about her beautiful mouth telling of firmness and determination, that she gained unlimited power over him. She might tease or amuse him by her mirth and merriment, but she never made such an impression as when she put forth the real strength of mind and spirit, which in gayer moments she concealed; he then felt her his superior in nobleness and truth, and his wily cunning sank before her straightforward warmth.

"I submit," said he, "and we part now in ignorance of when, how, and where we shall meet again; but, May, if there come no change

"Only see, Harry," said Grace to him that evening, when he was sitting comfortably by her side, "here is a note which I had from May Luttrell. Think of her being actually engaged to Mr. Cameron!"

"Engaged to Mr. Cameron! Impossible! She is joking!"

"Oh, no, I wish she were; but she told me about this two days ago, and I fear she is quite serious."

"She, that pretty young girl, engaged to a man old enough to be her grandfather! how very disgusting! That is all for money; she said she would be rich. She is going the right way certainly to secure it; but I should not have suspected her of being so disgracefully mercenary."

"I am grieved at it—quite grieved," said Grace, sorrowfully; "it is very sad, and I felt so sure you would be shocked that I did not like to tell you until it was quite certain. I love her very much myself.

"She is quite unworthy of your love, Grace. A girl who can sell herself for money, deserves no affection from a woman like you."

"Oh no, indeed; do not think ill of me,

Harry, for trying to excuse her, or suppose that I estimate her conduct lightly; but indeed she has so much of good in her composition, so much generosity, and truth, and honour, that I cannot condemn her quite."

"I could not think ill of you, Grace, for being candid and generous yourself, but I may think you blinded by your affection to the depth of her fault. She wants, I suppose, to be a rich young widow."

"No, I do not think she does; she only wants to be a rich young wife, and she does not know what it is to love and be loved. But she will not be happy."

"No, we know that," replied Harry, "they who 'haste to be rich,' will only hasten into trouble, vexation, and sorrow; but if she has the noble qualities for which you give her credit, perhaps the troubles may be a blessing to her, even if the riches prove vanity and misery."

"I trust so," said Grace, thoughtfully.

"Her mind seems to require discipline to bring it to a just appreciation of life and its trials," continued Harry. "If she builds her hopes of happiness on the empty pleasures of the world, she will soon learn her mistake. It

is the error of a wild and thoughtless disposition."

"True," replied the wife, "but it is an error, Harry, only too common, for it matters little whether hopes of happiness are founded on prosperity or pleasure, or domestic comfort, or affection, on the worth or the wealth of our fellow-men—they are all perishable, transitory, fleeting, and in the end betray their worshippers. It may seem more noble to make earthly love our idol instead of earthly gold, but is it more wise?"

He did not answer: he was musing on something else, but presently he said:

"May Luttrell is Wildey's cousin, and I suppose, if this match is in prospect, that is the reason why he has grown so captious and unpleasant lately. He probably has his head turned by the hopes of his cousin's advancement, and does not know how to contain himself."

"Is he disagreeable? I am sorry for it, love."

"He has been lately particularly so, both to your father and myself. There has been no pleasing him in anything. Your father was especially annoyed to-day, by his trying to

prove him wrong in some of his accounts. I knew the error was Wildey's and was able to shew it; but it is very disagreeable to have these sort of differences."

"With my father—try to prove him wrong! what a shame! Oh, Harry! what a wretch he is! My father, who has been more than forty years in the house, and of whom Mr. Cameron himself thinks and speaks so highly."

"Hush, hush, my dear Grace, your feelings get the better of your sense. Anybody may make a mistake, and though Wildey's manners were particularly unpleasant and annoying, still if he really thought even your father wrong, he was right to investigate it."

"He must have known better. Do you know, Harry, I saw you had been annoyed when you came in, but as you said nothing, I did not like to ask you the reason. I thought I had no business to interfere with what you did not choose to tell me."

"Good girl! but, Grace, I trust you greatly in telling you this, and you must not, of course, you know, gossip about it to any one—not even Jane."

"Certainly not, Harry dear, I should be

afraid of doing harm and making mischief; for if such annoyances came to be talked of, they might make a trifling disagreement into a serious breach, and we know in that case who must be the loser. Was my father much annoyed at the circumstance?"

"I never saw him more so. He is advancing in life, dear, and these things vex men more then, than they do when they are younger. I was sorry on his account, and would twenty times rather Wildey had only blamed me instead of him. It would not have mattered."

"Dear, good Harry!" said his wife, looking at him with tears in her eyes. "Well, we must have our own little troubles, I suppose, like the rest of the world. It is all for our good; but my poor, dear father!"

"Well, do not grieve, Grace," replied he, kissing her affectionately, "it is over now, and may not happen again, and I am sure Mr. Cameron will stand our friend."

"Ah, and Mrs. Cameron, too, Harry; we may not have much more intercourse perhaps, but she will still be kind, no doubt,"

"I hope so, for your sake. But, Grace, when the love of money is so strong, or the

desire for greatness, or any such worldly passion, it is always likely to swallow up the better feelings, and harden the heart into selfish indifference. Do not, therefore depend too much on her."

CHAPTER VI.

DUKE.—There at the moated grange resides this dejected Mariana.—MEASURE FOR MEASURE.

THE old postchaise which conveyed May Luttrell the last seven miles of her journey, afforded her plenty of time, as it rattled, jingled and jolted slowly along, to reflect on her prospects present and future, to consider what she had done, and what she was about to do. In the whirl of the rail-road, the anxiety to secure the right train, and stop at the right station, she had not found leisure either for retrospection or anticipation; and afterwards, in the coach which carried her another twenty miles, she had been so very uncomfortable, wedged in tightly by a stout farmer's wife on one side, with her three fat, riotous boys kicking her shins, or upsetting on her knees in front, that

she must have been a great deal more of a philosopher than she was, to have found time for any sensations but discomfort, or to be sensible of any wish but the termination of her journey.

But she had her present equipage all to herself, and not feeling particularly exhilarated at the prospect immediately before her, either literally or figuratively, she took refuge in day-dreams of a more interesting description; and future hopes shone forth with greater brilliancy from the contrast which her imagination drew, as she compared the prancing chestnuts and smooth-rolling carriage which was to convey her back to London, with the wearisome vehicle which now bore her along. The horses, slowly as they crept along, did at last reach the end of their journey, and driving through the old gateway, with its moss-grown pillars and gate off its hinges, jogged up to the door of her uncle's house. It was a tall, thin, dismal-looking dwelling, with dingy brick walls, a red tile roof, surmounted by a pinnacle in the centre, on which groaned and creaked an antiquated weathercock. On each side of the door stood two yew-trees, once neatly clipped, but

ow widely straggling from their origina
idal shape. Beyond them were several
the same kind, but large and spr
obscuring the cheerful sunlight fro
outhern windows, and causing a p
raught around the house, as the long b
raved in the wind. Beneath a grove o
irs, and Lombardy poplars in the back
stood the rambling and half-dilapidated
which formed the dairy, the barn,
stables for the two cart-horses and Mr.
pony. Beyond these spread a larg
shallow and much encroached on by t
and willows which covered its flat b
on either side stretched huge ozier b
as the eye could see. The air felt d
heavy, the water looked leaden and sta
sun shed a faint and watery beam
rustling yews, and a raven, slowly
above the house, croaked hoarsely an
he passed.

Old Joe, the antiquated indivi
managed, or mismanaged, the farm
hobbled up to the chaise-door to t
the young lady to descend. As M
a chilly gust swept through the y

nished her strength or affected her lungs. she did not wish to encounter her, she ope the opposite door and entered the room wh sat her uncle, engrossed by a large book.

"Ah, my dear," said he, raising his h from his hands as she entered, "is that y I am glad you are come at last."

May skipped up to him and kissed affectionately.

"So you do know me again," said laughing, "though I have been nearly weeks away. I did not expect you w remember me."

"My dear, my memory is very good, a am not likely to forget you whom I have kn for sixteen years in the course of six weeks

"How is Nanny?" inquired May; "is very ill?"

"She says she is," replied Mr. Luttrell, ' she is about as usual, which is very good of as she says she ought to be in bed, though strives against it for my sake, that I may be alone quite."

"And I suppose," said May, "she is as s tempered as usual?"

"I do not think she has been partic

sweet in her temper for some days; but suffering as she is, no doubt it is very trying, and we cannot wonder if she is a little cross."

May did not say aloud that she should wonder very much if it was only a *little* crossness that Mrs. Nanny exhibited, but she thought it nevertheless.

"And what have you been doing, uncle, in the way of music and reading? I have brought something new for you from London."

"Have you, indeed! Well, I hope Nanny will soon get better, and then we can try it, but she has not been able to bear my practising lately."

"Ah, well, she shall not stop you now. But uncle, have you had tea? I am so hungry after my journey."

"No, my dear, Nanny has not been punctual lately; she is often, as she says taken bad just about meal-times, and then I have to wait."

"Well, I will tell her to bring it now, whilst I go and arrange myself after my journey."

May walked boldly into the kitchen. The imperious housekeeper was engaged in stirring some decoction which was boiling over the fire, and did not speak as the young lady entered.

"Well, Nanny, how do you do?" said May good-humouredly. "I am sorry to hear you have been ill."

"Ill indeed! I dare say you are, Miss May! Ill indeed! it's a mercy I'm alive to tell of it! Left alone here, in this weary place, with only a deaf old man to talk to! enough to make a body ill I trow; I'm safe to say, that nobody has ever had such an illness as mine, and strove, and strove so hard against it."

"Oh!" said May, and then added, "I want to put some water on for our tea, that it may boil, whilst I am getting things in order up-stairs; for I am hungry and tired."

"Ay, ay, Miss May; but you may as well leave me to mind my own business, I think! A fine young lady like you, who goes trapesing about to London, and seeing all fine sights, what has she got to do with boiling water, or setting tea-things!"

May did not attempt to dispute with the old tyrant, but coolly filled the small kettle, and set it on the fire.

"It's a mercy I did not die, I say!" continued Nanny, "what would your uncle have done

for, and your room shall be ready enough before you want it to-night. A fine thing indeed! if I am not good enough to wait on you!"

So very efficacious was the censure implied in May's proposition, that within ten minutes the tea things were set in order, and the uncle and niece were partaking of a quiet meal, and half-an-hour afterwards, old Nanny popped her head in at the door to say:

"You may go to bed, now, Miss May, when you have a mind to, for your room is quite ready!"

The evening passed away, and May was so occupied in telling her uncle all she had seen and done in London, and afterwards in playing and singing to him, that she quite forgot to ask him who was the visitor coming to see them; nor did she remember that such a person was expected, until after she had retired to her own room. She had then a strong fit of curiosity; so strong that she ran out to her uncle's door to make the inquiry. But she heard him snoring so loudly, that she did not like to rouse him again, and once more she returned to prepare for her night's rest.

The dreary aspect of her room, struck her as

her eyes. She had drawn back the curtain, and the bright moonbeams streamed into the room, pure and fair; and something in the solemn aspect of the night, in the clear brilliancy of the stars above the house, and the gentle sound of the wind as it murmured in the thick foliage of the trees, carried her thoughts back to Grace Dunsford, and her true and generous character. She saw clearly at that moment, how very far inferior were her aims in life, to those of her friend; how frivolous and unworthy of an immortal spirit were the trifling luxuries on which she had founded her hopes of happiness, and for which she had bartered her hand. The words of Grace's farewell note came into her mind, with greater power than ever; her affectionate warning, her earnest entreaty, her kind wishes; all these flashed on her memory at the moment. She considered what she was intending to do; and she thought of it with shame, disgust, and repentance. She burst into a passion of tears, and sobbed with mingled feelings to which she could have given no name.

She knew that to-morrow's post would bring the letter from Mr. Cameron, to her uncle, and

she resolved in this moment of contrition, to take advantage of the opportunity, to retract her promise; to give up her views of worldly wealth, release herself from her engagement to her cousin James, and rather spend her life in honourable poverty and quiet seclusion, than endure the reproaches of her conscience, for such a disgraceful bargain as she had concluded. With these resolutions she fell asleep at last, and her various agitations ended in profound repose.

But she did not wake in the same disposition. Her bed-room by day-light presented the same forlorn appearance that had struck her the night before; she longed for comfort and luxury. She opened the window, and gazed out at the level, uninteresting landscape, and she thought of the lovely woods, the verdant parks, the fair mansions which she had passed during her yesterday's journey; where all had seemed so eloquently to speak of wealth; so completely in contrast with the dreary desolation now surrounding her. She thought of foreign scenery, such as she had viewed in paintings, and she felt she would give anything in her power to exchange the dull flatness of her present

prospect, for the gayer variety which hope whispered to her, she might enjoy if she adhered to her engagement. She heard below the window the sharp tones of Nanny's tongue, mixing with the grumbling harsh replies of Joe, defending himself from some accusations which the housekeeper brought against him; and it seemed to her, that one great step to perfect felicity, would be to escape from the dominion of this domestic tyrant, and never again hear the sound of her voice.

No, no, she would not, in a fit of wild romance, throw away the only hope of enjoyment, which had ever been offered to her. Grace might dream of self-denial and humility, but it never could be required that any one should sacrifice such brilliant prospects for a mere scruple of conscience. It was in fact her duty to embrace the opportunity of an eligible establishment, to relieve her uncle from the burden of her maintainance, to have it in her power to recompense him for former kindness; there would indeed be a large degree of generous self-denial in following this course, she was really giving up a great deal in accepting an old husband, and she speedily convinced herself that

it was equally noble and virtuous to take her original wishes for a guide, and banish those doubts which had distressed her the preceding night.

She went down to breakfast with her uncle, with a mind made up as to the course she should take, but a heart a little palpitating, as she anticipated the letter which was this morning to arrive.

Her anxiety on this subject did not quite swallow up her curiosity with reference to the expected visitor, and she immediately began questioning Mr. Luttrell on this point.

Mr. Arnold, the friend who had so unexpectedly offered him a visit, was it appeared, a person whom he had not met for the last twenty years, but they had been once on very intimate terms. As to what he was now like, of course Mr. Luttrell could form but a very faint idea. He remembered him a young, fair, but shy scholar, one who hated woman's society, and found ample occupation in study and writing. He had followed no profession, but had spent many years wandering over the continents of Asia and America; writing about once in two years to his old school-fellow, and always promising, that if ever he came to England he

would pay him a visit. When he had heard of him last year, he was meditating an expedition to the islands of the Pacific; and now Mr. Luttrell said he was a good deal surprised to find that he was actually in London, and intending to come down to Littlemere, perhaps next week, perhaps next month; it was rather uncertain when he would arrive, but he would be very welcome when he did come.

"Oh, certainly," said May, "we can make him welcome; we have time to bestow on another visitor still, in spite of the crowds who surround us."

Mr. Luttrell looked round, as if trying to see these imaginary crowds, and after a little consideration answered.

"I do not think we have many visitors!"

"I don't remember ever seeing one here, for these two years at least," replied May, "I suppose, uncle, Mr Arnold is not very young now, if he was grown up twenty years ago; he must be verging on a hundred, or thereabouts."

"No, I do not think he is so much as a hundred, May! I should say he was about forty, as nearly as I can guess."

"I wish one knew when he would come, I

do not see why he should keep us in a state of suspense like this. It is too trying for one's constitution."

"I dare say he will let us know, as soon as he has made up his mind himself."

"A hundred thousand thanks to him for the same," replied she, laughing.

"I am going out riding, May," said her uncle presently, "as soon as I have done my breakfast."

"Where to?"

"I want to see Coker about my corn, and to speak to the miller."

"But the mill is five miles off, you will not be back for an age!"

"I do not think I shall be gone so long as that."

"You will not be back by the time the post comes in."

"I dare say not, but I do not expect any letters, my dear; so that does not signify at all."

"But I think you will have one, uncle, and I want you to stay and read it as soon as it comes."

"I never have any letters which matter at all, not at this time in the year at least, so it can wait much better than my business with Coker; and Nanny says I must speak about the flour, it is so bad, it makes her ill, I understand."

"Nanny, ill indeed; she is as ill as I am, I believe," said May, scornfully.

"Are you not well, my dear, pray take care of yourself then; it would not do to have you both laid up at once."

In spite of May's remonstrances, Mr. Luttrell rode off, and left her to meditate in solitude, unless she sought the variety of Nanny's society. Of course, whilst he was out, the postman arrived and left a letter, as she supposed, but Mrs. Nanny did not bring it in, so after waiting a few minutes, May got impatient and went out to see if she could learn anything certain on the subject.

She saw Nanny standing at the door, examining a letter with great attention; she turned it over, inspected the seal and the address, tried, to decipher the motto, and studied the post-mark; but on May's appearance she hastily thrust it into her pocket, and began to hurry off to the kitchen.

"Is that letter for you, Nanny, that you have there?" said May eagerly.

"It ain't for you at least," responded the woman angrily.

"Because I think if it is for my uncle, you

with a very bad grace, she pulled it out of her pocket, and gave it to him, and then stood watching to see what the result would be.

Mr. Luttrell looked at the writing with great curiosity, stepping back a pace or two, so as to lean against the kitchen-dresser whilst he examined it, he then investigated the seal, and turning to his niece he observed, in rather a desponding tone, that he had not the least idea whom it came from.

"And can't you open it then to see?" exclaimed Nanny, who was as eager to have the seal broken in her presence, as May was to persuade her uncle to come away. "Sure the inside would tell you at once who is the writer, and what it is all about. There sit down, and read it at once."

"Do come away uncle, to the library," said May coaxingly, "it is so hot here, you cannot read it comfortably; come and sit in your own chair, and let me read it to you."

"If I had the least idea what it is all about," said he in a helpless languid voice, "I would not mind opening it at once."

"No, no," said May taking it from him in the desperation of her feelings, "you really must come with me, and do not stand here any

meet your approbation, a line by return of p
will greatly oblige

"Your humble servant,

"GEORGE CAMERON.'

Had this epistle been inscribed in the anci
Runic characters, it could hardly have puz
Mr. Luttrell more than did this plain
intelligible English. For some minutes, he
in silent, blank amazement, listening appare
for something more to come; some key to
mystery, which he could not unravel. At len
finding May continued silent, he inquire
that was all?

She only nodded an affirmative.

"Then who is this George Cameron, M
said he turning over the letter again and ag
as if expecting to find some further explana
on its three blank sides. "I never hear
him before in my life."

"He is a very rich merchant in Lon
uncle."

"And what does he write to me for, le
see—" he began to read the letter grav
"your amiable niece, Miss Luttrell—" he

again, and looked up inquiringly. "I did not know there was any Miss Luttrell but you, May."

"Well uncle, he means me," said she laughing and blushing.

"Eh, you, well—let's see, what comes next?" he read on in silence. "I don't quite understand this," added he presently, "does he mean that he proposes to marry you?"

"Exactly."

"And that you have accepted him, my dear."

She nodded again.

"Then why does he ask me about it, he could not suppose that I should object if you liked it."

May laughed again, and said he did not know anything about such forms, or he would be aware that it was proper to go through this ceremony.

Mr. Luttrell considered a little, and then said.

"And do you really want to marry this George Cameron, May?"

"Yes, uncle, I told him I would when I was in London."

"Very well, then I will write to him and say I have no objection. Give me a sheet of paper and a pen."

He sat down, and indited the following letter.

"Sir,

"As I never heard your name before, I was a good deal surprised, when I came in from my morning's ride to Coker's farm, a man who always buys my corn, but that is by the bye, and when you come down here, I shall have much pleasure in showing you his house, as well as telling you how happy I am that you should be willing to marry May. She has no fortune of her own, except what I shall give her, which will be small, as for instance, this old house and the thirty acres round, and Nanny always said she would never marry any one, because she is so wild and flighty. Not that I think so at all, as she always struck me as being cross and unjust in everything she says of her, I mean Nanny; but as she has lived with me five-and-thirty years, I do not like to part with her, although it might justly be said 'Item she is curst' indeed I should say 'she was a vixen when she went to school,' which was to the Sunday school, three miles off when young. But to return to my niece and your proposal,

fifty thousand pounds is a great deal of money, and honestly come by, may be a great blessing, though we know Solomon held wisdom to be better than riches. It therefore behoves those who possess it, to see that they employ it rightly, and do not give it away to those who know not how to use it. As to May, she is still very young and I might say of her 'she is mortal, but by immortal Providence she is mine.' She is a good little girl enough, and I think her pretty too, but if you love music, she is just suited to you, for 'can any mortal mixture of earth's mould, breathe such divine enchanting ravishment?' In short, Sir, we shall be very happy to see you here, as she says she is quite ready to marry you, and I am sure I will make no objection, so I consider on the whole that you are very lucky in your choice, since you have fifty thousand pounds to bestow on somebody, and

"Believe me,
"Yours very obediently,
"STEPHEN LUTTRELL."

When, after considerable deliberation and labour, Mr. Luttrell had succeeded in composing

this letter, he read it to his niece with much pride of heart, and the fullest expectation of her approval and admiration.

He was not a little surprised, when instead of expressing any such sentiments, she burst out laughing, and appeared for some minutes quite unable to stop herself.

"What is there so amusing May?" said he, looking bewildered,

"Oh, my dear uncle," cried May with tears in her eyes from the excess of her merriment. "when Mr. Cameron reads that, he will think it is I who am cross and vixenish, and have lived with you five-and-thirty years."

"No, my dear, I do not think he will, he must know I meant Nanny."

"Indeed, indeed it will never, never do," cried she.

"What?" asked her uncle.

"The letter, the letter, uncle, you must not send it. I cannot indeed let it go."

"I do not see why not; I cannot imagine what fault you can find with it, my dear, and I really cannot write another."

May took it, and re-perused the document, as gravely as she could; then after a little reflection

she came to the conclusion that, on the whole, it would be better to allow it to be sent as it was. Mr. Cameron might be a little puzzled at first, and probably would be a good deal surprised. He would, she could imagine, hold the man very cheaply who would answer a letter of business in such an unbusiness-like way, but he must, if he took pains, make out the sense, and it would give him on the whole, so clear an idea of the turn of her uncle's mind, that it would do good rather than harm.

It is true she could have written a letter herself much briefer, and more to the purpose; but it did not matter, as she could not always write her uncle's letters, and Mr. Cameron must sooner or later discover for himself the extraordinary mixture of qualities good and bad which formed her uncle's character.

So she retracted her first assertion, declared the letter would do very well, and proceeded gravely to fold, seal and direct it. It was accordingly committed to the postman's care, without Nanny succeeding in even getting a peep at the address—a circumstance which May exerted herself to bring about, and which gave her peculiar satisfaction. She also took par-

ticular care that Mr. Cameron's own letter should not be left about the room, for which end she ran off with it, and locked it up in the most secure of her own repositories.

She was perfectly right when she conjectured that the good merchant would be a little astonished at the style of Mr. Luttrell's letter, and that his first impression would be that his correspondent was mad. However, as he was slow and methodical in his own proceedings, he took time enough to study the whole composition, and after a little consideration, easily made out the meaning, and certified to himself that Mr. Luttrell had no intention of either speaking ill of his niece or of opposing their union. His engagement to her was therefore considered as a thing quite decided, and he allowed himself to commence a correspondence with her; but as the first excitement of success had worn off before, he was very well able now to conceal or suppress his raptures, and felt no temptation to allude to the subject when in conversation with his clerk; nor, in spite of Wildey's solicitude on the subject, was there anything in his superior's manner which could encourage him to advert to the topic.

This sudden silence and reserve on Mr. Cameron's part, greatly perplexed and disturbed the clerk. Various ideas floated through his brain with reference to it, but none seemed sufficiently plausible to afford him satisfaction. Sometimes, he fancied that Mr. Cameron had quite changed his mind on the subject of matrimony; then he feared that he had met with a repulse from May; again, on discovering that the merchant went out more often than formerly, and especially frequented the society of a lady who had three grown-up daughters, he was seized with a terrible dread that his affections had been transferred to some other object; and whilst he hesitated in his fears between the mother and the young ladies, and alternately accused each of having been the rival to his cousin, he suffered all the agonies of doubt and despondency with reference to his favourite project, without having any power of relieving his mind by ascertaining the truth.

In addition to this uneasiness, he had another in the want of May's society, more than he had anticipated, and he felt strongly tempted to give up all idea of making her Mrs. Cameron, and propose at once to secure her only as Mrs.

Wildey. This plan, indeed, was not one to be lightly resolved on. He was poor, in his own estimation, and she was, he believed, poorer still; it would have its disadvantages and its drawbacks, and there was a continual struggle in his mind on the subject—passion dictating one course, whilst prudence pointed out another. His sister had never appeared to him so uninteresting, so dull, so utterly insipid as now that he had no other companion, and she, poor thing had never before known her brother so cross, so capricious, and so hard to please. Her situation had never been a sinecure one, but now it was complete slavery; and fortunate it was for her that her temper was so passive and her imagination so dull, as a shadow more of spirit, a trifle of self-will would have made it quite impossible for her to continue with him.

CHAPTER VIII.

Q. CATH. I am a simple woman, much too weak
To oppose your cunning.

HENRY VIII.

A MONTH passed away after May Luttrell returned to her uncle's house, without bringing any decided change to the individuals connected with my story. Nanny still continued cross and waspish, especially on the subject of the expected visitor; indeed, as housekeeper, she had some right to complain, for Mr. Arnold, although writing once a-week about his intended visit, continued to put it off indefinitely. May heard regularly from her respectable lover in London, and his letters, which were almost as formal in composition as punctual in appearance, were the

only diversion or variety which th
had. She really suffered from the
after the comparative gaiety of
London. Littlemere could not appe
than oppressively dull. Her engag
as yet a profound secret, that i
the country. Nancy knew nothin
nor was it suspected in London by
Cameron's connections or dependant

Wildey remained in the same s
acting suspense with regard to the
movements and resolutions, and
was constantly exasperated alike by
and his love.

Mr. Cameron continued to at
business as usual, and showed no
in his habits and manners that
propensity to go into company.
however, any admiration for th
whose influence Wildey was jeal
because he had discovered that one
ladies in question was herself ex
married, and he visited at the ho
sir[illegible]tention of getting well upo
[illegible] love, and carrying on an
[illegible] the young coun

mind. You are welcome to go for a week." And this was the only answer the young man could obtain.

Mr. Luttrell and his niece were ready to receive Mr. Wildey and his sister, who, it was settled should accompany him, and May had great pleasure in worrying Nanny into getting the old rooms ready for the party now expected. They had only two spare bed-rooms in the house, and as these had not been inhabited for several years, there was some little preparation necessary to get them both in a habitable state, and no small degree of contrivance requisite to make the furniture, scanty even for one, look at all suitable for two apartments. The old house was thrown into an extraordinary state of excitement; Nanny was glad enough now to have assistance from without, and May danced about with great glee, pulling out antiquated furniture from the lumber-room in the attics, and dusting, rubbing, and polishing, to make old chairs and tables look like handsome modern articles.

In the midst of all this bustle, Mr. Luttrell received a final letter from his friend Arnold

Miss Wildey can have my room, and then it's all easy."

"And pray where are *you* to sleep, Miss May, I'd be glad to know?"

"Oh, I; my room does not signify at all, a little bed put up in the small closet at the end of the passage, will do quite well; I am not the least particular, and it will only be for a week, as James Wildey cannot stay longer, and then we can keep Mr. Arnold as long as he likes."

"Oh, very well, as you please, only don't say it's my fault if you are uncomfortable; and as to a bed, I am sure I don't know where we are to find it, for we have none in the house, so you must sleep on the ground I suppose!"

"I dare say the Cokers can lend us one, and they will be ready enough to do it for my uncle; so you need not make difficulties out of nothing."

"*I* make difficulties, Miss May, I am sure I make nothing a difficulty, I, indeed! why here am I slaving, and slaving, like a black-a-more, and then to be told I make difficulties indeed; I wonder what next?"

May ran away from her indignation, and

seeking her uncle, had to demonstrate to him the necessity of active measures to prepare for the reception of so much company.

The good man put away his music, and put on his hat, with a touching air of resignation, preparatory to doing his niece's bidding; and when she had seen him fairly off on his errand, she sat down to laugh at the oddity of her wants, and to think how differently she should be circumstanced when she was a rich Mrs. Cameron instead of poor Miss Luttrell, obliged to borrow the necessaries of life, of her neighbours.

By dint of great exertion, the house was in a tolerable state of quiet and comfort, when Mr. Arnold, the long-talked-of, the much thought-of guest arrived. May had expected him to be something singular, different from anything she had ever seen before: she had a sort of idea that a man who had travelled all over the world must retain some marks of his wanderings, and she was prepared to treat him with respectful deference.

She was therefore not a little surprised on his appearance to discover merely an ordinary looking man, with a smooth shining face, pale

yellow hair, plain inexpressive features, and unpolished abrupt manners. He seemed glad to see his old friend, but his gladness was quiet and little demonstrative; he gave merely a quick hurried look at May, and attempted to say nothing; but although taking little notice of others, he was evidently careful of his own comfort, the day chanced to be cold and rainy; his great coat was wet, and he instantly despatched it to the kitchen-fire to dry; he then advanced hastily into the sitting-room, and stirred up the fire there, turned himself round slowly before it, warming himself alternately before and behind, then after eyeing the room for some minutes, he very deliberately seized on Mr. Luttrell's easy chair, wheeled it up to the fire, and deposited himself therein, that he might enjoy the opportunity of placing one foot on the fender and the other other on the hob, and thus secure to them, in their turn, the full benefit of the refreshing blaze.

May had been gravely watching his manœuvres in silence, and with some little internal amusement; her uncle, meanwhile, had been anxiously endeavouring to aid in carrying their visitor's several portmanteaus, and other travelling con-

veniences to his bed-room ; that done he entered the library.

"You seem to have a snug little seat here, Luttrell," said Arnold to him without turning his head. "You spend most of your time here, I think."

"Yes, usually," replied the host, "but however, I can do very well without it at present ; you are welcome to keep it as long as you like, for your own use."

"Eh !" ejaculated his visitor ; but his want of comprehension did not to all appearance, strike the master of the house, who continued to stand near the fire, looking rather disconsolate at the loss of his chair, in spite of the hospitable assurances he thought himself obliged to make.

"I suppose you are tired," said he presently.

"No," was the only response.

"Or cold," added he.

"Not now," replied Arnold in a brief tone.

Silence followed, which the visitor broke ; by observing : "Charming country this, Luttrell, I could not have fancied such a scene."

"I do not know that I do admire it much," replied the other, simply.

"Picturesque in the extreme," added he.

"I am glad you like it, I hope you will find yourself comfortable, Arnold!"

"No doubt, in this luxurious apartment," glancing round with an air of disdain.

"Do you know, I was half afraid you might find some deficiencies; I do not think we are very well off for furniture. Indeed I have sometimes thought of buying another arm-chair—"

"Ah—"

"But you see we can accommodate a friend," pursued Mr. Luttrell.

"Why, a fellow who has slept in an Esquimaux hut, or put up in an Indian wigwam, can I suppose, make himself at home under most untoward circumstances; luckily for me, I am not particular about comforts."

"I should have thought that you were," observed May, advancing from her retreat.

Mr. Arnold stared at her in silent astonishment.

"I hope that you are not more nice in your eating," cried Mr. Luttrell, "our fare is very plain indeed."

"Not at all, not at all, I can dine on anything. Turtle-fins in the West Indies, bird's-nest soup in the East, caviar in Russia, or

beccafiquos in Italy; it is all one to me, I can very well make a meal on roast beef in England."

"I suppose," said May, with mock humility, "you only require the best of anything which can be had, well cooked, and plenty of it."

He nodded assent, and then added, "you are a sensible girl, Miss Luttrell."

It was evidently no vain boast on Mr. Anrold's part, that he could make himself comfortable, and at home, under any circumstances; he certainly did at Littlemere, at all events. He continued still to engross the only comfortable chair, to arrange both fire, air, and light according to his own taste; he sent May on messages, ordered his own meals at breakfast and tea, lounged on a table by himself, where he required a separate equipage; and swallowed nearly all the sugar and cream in one cup: he quarrelled with the beer of Nanny's brewing, and insisted on her setting to work to make some much stronger; by which measure he intimated to his host how long he intended to remain with them, and all this time, he testified neither pleasure nor obligation for what was done for him, but seemed to consider they were

the parties obliged by his presence, and ought to be thankful that they were allowed to wait on him.

Sometimes May was angry at his various selfish impertinences, but in general she laughed, and bore it very well; as to Mr. Luttrell, he felt infinitely obliged by his friend's kindness in bestowing his company on them, and never thought of questioning the propriety of his proceedings; and Nanny had been so overawed by his once going into a passion on the occasion of her demurring to his orders, when he swore at her in some unknown tongue, that she never afterwards dared to hesitate, but obeyed him with the docility of a well-trained spaniel.

Three days passed, and the afternoon arrived on which May expected her cousins, an event which she hoped would bring her far more amusement than their present visitor's presence afforded. She was longing for a little flattery and harmless flirtation, as she styled her mode of proceeding, with Mr. Wildey. Her self-importance was sadly trampled on by the obedience exacted by Mr. Arnold; her beauty and wit were alike powerless on him, he treated her

only as a maid-servant, never spoke to her except to give her an order, and what was much worse, never listened to her at all.

When the time came, indeed, long before they could be reasonably looked for, she was running to the window to discover if she could not either hear or see their chaise, until Mr. Arnold grew impatient, and told her to sit still, he hated a bustle in the room.

To sit still, however, was impossible, so she ran out, determined to meet them *en route*, and tell them all about Mr. Arnold, and his peculiarities. The day was bright, but fresh and windy; she ran along the road, her bonnet in her hand, and her long curls streaming in the breeze, thinking of old times, that is, times about six weeks ago, and of all that her visit to her cousins had done for her, and wondering whether they would enjoy their trip into Lincolnshire, anything like so much as she had her abode in London.

She had gone nearly a mile along the road, when she saw the old post-chaise, with whose appearance she was well acquainted, descending a small declivity a short distance from where she stood. She stopped to await its approach,

and looking eagerly at it, she soon perceived her cousin James' face through the window. He saw her too, as she stood upon a little raised foot-path by the roadside, the wind blowing her black scarf from her shoulders, and half-blinding her eyes with the glossy ringlets, that it swept across her face.

He instantly stopped the chaise, and sprang out to join her, not a little flattered at what he supposed to be her affectionate impatience to greet him. Ann Wildey, too, looked out, and spoke, but they did not attend to her, so she waited quietly until a better opportunity. This was not, indeed, May's fault, for she found her whole attention engrossed by her elder cousin, who seized both her hands, and held them fast, whilst he looked in her blooming face with an expression of admiration she could not mistake.

"My dearest May," cried he, "how glad I am to see you, how well you are looking; as beautiful and merry as ever."

"Of course, I am," replied she, drawing back, and struggling to release her hands, "what else have I got to do in the country."

"How kind of you to come and meet me!"

"Quite accidental; I was just as likely to have taken the other road."

"I am so glad, so very glad to see you, May."

"You may as well let me speak to Ann, I think."

"I will walk home with you, May, and we will send on the carriage; I suppose it is not far."

"You may walk home if you like, because then I can go in the chaise with Ann; you have only to follow us, you cannot lose your way, unless you go wrong."

"No, no, May, you must not leave me behind alone: indeed, you shall not. Drive on, post-boy; we will follow."

The post-boy took him at his word, and whipped up his horses into their customary hobbling trot. May looked after them with a smile.

"Don't think you have conquered me," said she, turning to her cousin, "I did not really want to go with Ann, or I would have done so, and what's more, you had better not provoke me, here in my own domains, or you shall rue it sorely."

"I do not wish to provoke you, dear May; I am only too happy to have you here at all, to see you once more."

May turned her dark eyes on him with a scrutinising glance, looking at him from head to foot, and then again eyeing his face; there was something in his tone which took her by surprise; more of earnestness and warmth than she had expected; something which told her she had more power than formerly, and the idea flashed across her mind that she might after all make more impression than was desirable, and acquire more influence than she could safely employ.

"You are extremely complimentary and polite," said she in a scoffing tone, "I suppose you studied speeches all the way down, and if I had not something else to tell you, I would ask you for a few more of them, but I must warn you that if you mean to make love to me, you will meet with a rival at home."

"A rival, May?" with a very perceptible start, and change of countenance.

"Yes; don't quarrel with him for my smiles; I will have no duels or disputes, but, you know, I always told you my uncle's friend, Mr. Arnold,

was coming to marry me. He is at Littlemere now."

"You don't say so?"

"Indeed he is, and we get on charmingly; he is the most devoted and attentive of lovers; I never knew before what it was to be so worshipped and admired. So you see, under the circumstances, I recommend you to give over all thoughts of making love to me, as it will not do."

"And is this true, May?" replied her cousin, excessively perplexed.

"I will say no more about it," replied she, archly, "you shall see and judge for yourself, but remember my warning. When did you see Mr. Cameron last, James?"

"Yesterday," he replied, then walked thoughtfully on. Presently he added: "It is as well we gave up that plan, May, he is a changeable man in some things, and I do not think that marriage could ever be brought about."

"Oh, very well," answered May, "I am sure I do not care now. I am not anxious on the subject."

She thought it best to assume an air of pique, lest he should guess from her indifference that

she was really secure; so she walked on, making believe to pout, whilst he eyed her with interest and attention. He was beginning to be quite in earnest in his intention of marrying her himself; and he was not without many flattering *prestiges* of success. She had come so far to meet him, and seemed so happy now he was arrived; she had been dull and out of spirits before, as he had gathered from her letters; no doubt this was the result of her anxious and uncertain affection, whilst doubtful of a return she would of course be uneasy. And if she were really piqued at Mr. Cameron's indifference, that would make his own success more certain, his sympathy, admiration and love would appear to greater advantage, after the neglect of the other. The only impediment was the presence of this rival at Littlemere, he might be a dangerous individual, but of this he should soon be able to judge, and he should then know what steps to take.

James Wildey must have been very much blinded, indeed, by his passion, before he could have seriously contemplated such an unprofitable alliance as this.

Whilst the two cousins were slowly walking

towards the house, Miss Wildey who had been allowed no choice on the occasion, was carried to the door at a quicker pace, and by this means was left to make the best of her own situation, and introduce herself as she could. Nanny was too busy attending to some domestic cookery for the gratification of Mr. Arnold, to leave her domain; but her assistant and deputy came forward to help in unloading the chaise, and desired the lady in a country dialect almost unintelligible, to walk into the library, but as the injunction was accompanied by a gesture, comprising a shove on her own shoulder, and a kick against the door in question, Miss Wildey comprehended and obeyed.

There sat Mr. Arnold alone, the master of the house being out of the room. He looked up with an inquiring but careless glance. She hesitated, advanced, stopped, went forward another step, and then said feebly:

"I am Ann Wildey."

"Oh," was his response.

"My brother is behind with Cousin May," she continued.

"Ah!"

"I suppose I address Mr. Luttrell?"

"Eh?"

"I beg pardon, is not it Mr. Luttrell to whom I speak."

"No."

She looked alarmed and puzzled.

"Pray can you tell me where he is?"

"Not here," replied the gentleman coolly, and preparing to return to his books.

"But, Sir, is not this his house, I thought it was, are you not the master? have I made a mistake?"

"Yes, in supposing me to be Mr. Luttrell, but since you are here, you had better sit down and be quiet; I hate a worry."

"But, Sir, if this is your house, pray tell me, for I cannot stay here, unless you are married; it would not be proper at all."

"Is Mr. Luttrell married, then?"

"Goodness me, what shall I do? I must go away, and I don't know where to go, for that stupid post-boy told me this was Littlemere; however, I will drive off directly and look for it."

"You must stay here, you will never find Littlemere if you drive away to-day, no, not if you go all over the county. Come, come,

Madam, I dare say you and I can make ourselves very comfortable together."

"Oh, no, no, I must go—oh dear, what will James say; oh my—he will be so angry; dear me, I wonder where I shall find him."

She turned round in an agony of despair, to make her retreat, and met Mr. Luttrell just behind her.

"Is anything the matter, my dear Madam," inquired he, politely, "anything in which I can be of service to you. I suppose I speak to Miss Wildey?"

"Oh, yes, but do not stop me, I must go this instant, or the carriage will be gone, and I shall lose—" she stopped, and tried to pass, but Mr. Luttrell continued to fill up the doorway.

"The carriage has gone, unfortunately," said he, calmly, "but no matter, I can send to the inn for anything you have forgotten; what have you lost, Madam?"

"My character!" gasped she, in the greatest distress.

"I beg your pardon," said Mr. Luttrell, in his turn amazed.

"And the innkeepers are not likely to return it, as it is an article in great request amongst them," observed Arnold.

"I thought this was Mr. Luttrell's house," continued she, "and that gentleman says he is the master of it, and that he is not married, and that I shall never find Littlemere, and I do not know what to do in the least."

"I am Mr. Luttrell, and this is Littlemere, and that gentleman is my friend, and you are very welcome here, Madam; may I ask where is your brother?"

She was too puzzled to answer.

"You have spoilt a capital joke, Luttrell," said his friend angrily, and then returned to his reading.

"Oh, I am so glad," cried Miss Wildey, "so very glad; so much obliged to you; it would have been so awkward if you had been anybody else, or anybody else had been you, I don't know what I should have done. Thank you, Sir, thank you, it is so good of you."

"What is?" inquired Mr. Luttrell, quite simply, "I could not help it."

"There is no doubt now of James coming here safely," continued the lady.

"I should hope not," said the host, "but may I ask where he is?"

"Oh, he met May, and stopped to speak to her on the road; he was so glad to see her; but he will of course soon come."

Nor was she wrong in her anticipations. An awkward silence, which followed her last speech, was broken by the entrance of Mr. Wildey and his cousin. The latter ran up to her lady-visitor, and exclaimed how sorry she was to have used her so ill; but it was all James' fault, she had not been able to help it.

Then turning to the gentlemen, she said:

"Uncle, here is Cousin James, whom you already know by character, as a wild, good-for-nothing young man. Mr. Arnold," going up to him with an air of confidential friendship which astonished him not a little. "I am sure *you* will be excessively delighted to make acquaintance with any relative of mine; I only wish this one were better worth your notice."

As her object was to perplex the whole party, she might be considered to have made a very successful speech, as she produced the desired effect. Her uncle paused a moment, and then said:

"I am sure I did not know it, my dear; but in that case, it is not proper, is it, to have him here."

Mr. Arnold, on the contrary, raised his eyes to her face for a moment, and after considering its expression, he suddenly turned round and shook Wildey vehemently by the hand, as if in corroboration of her assertion. This she had not expected, but it pleased her exceedingly, whilst it put the young man completely out of countenance, and he felt that he could with pleasure have knocked the stranger down on the spot.

May presently drew Miss Wildey away to her own room, begging her uncle to take care of her other cousin; this injunction he obeyed by pointing out the door of his bed-room and expressing a hope that he would make himself comfortable. Wildey was not sorry to withdraw, he wanted an interval to compose his spirits, and settle on the line of conduct most advisable to pursue under the circumstances. He felt excessively annoyed at what had just passed; and though he would not have supposed on seeing Mr. Arnold, that he was the least likely to captivate May, or win her affec-

tions, he yet could not disbelieve the evidence of his own observations, which testified to the good understanding existing between them.

The family did not meet again, until they assembled at dinner, by which time Wildey had made up his mind to be quiet and silent at first, until he had ascertained exactly the state of things existing between his cousin and this terrible rival.

He found, however, it was much easier to make resolutions than to keep them on this occasion; May was in such wild spirits, she would not allow him to be quiet, or silent. She was continually talking nonsense to him, and making the most extraordinary assertions possible, many of which her uncle contradicted in his quiet matter-of-fact way; and to many more he would have demurred, had he had time for such a process. Mr. Arnold, meantime, ate his dinner in silence and abstraction, and if he was attached to May, his affection was also largely shared by the roast mutton and chicken pie, on which his attention was greatly fixed. Miss Wildey was quiet as usual, only speaking when spoken to, and seldom addressed by any one except the

host when offering her civilities with scrupulous politeness.

May knew very well that she should not have the smallest chance of gaining Mr. Arnold's attention, whilst he was desirous of bestowing it all on his food; so she wisely forbore to address him, it being her particular object to make believe that he was her lover on the present occasion. She expected by thus repressing her cousin's hopes, and damping his too evident sense of security, she should induce him to keep his affections within proper bounds. Now that she was really engaged to Mr. Cameron, she did not desire an avowal of passion from the junior lover; she only wanted to keep him sufficiently under her own influence, to prevent him using the promise, which she already began to regret, in a way which might not be agreeable to herself. It might create ill-will and discomfort, if there came too candid an explanation between them, or if she actually excited an affection quite out of her power to return. A little torment she was not unwilling to deal out to him, but she had no intention of seriously wounding his self-love, or incurring his high displeasure, which

she was pretty well aware she should do, if she led him on to a declaration to which she could not choose but turn a deaf ear.

She thought that if she frightened him by threats of a rival, or testified equal interest in another person with himself, he would at least understand that she had no peculiar tenderness for him, and it would be his own fault if he allowed himself to become too fond of her under such circumstances.

Fortunately for her plans, Mr. Arnold had by this time become so well accustomed to her, that he was no longer so unpleasant to her as at first; and though neither admiration nor affection was in the slightest degree visible in his manners, he did not testify any repugnance to her speaking to him. Turning to him therefore when he had concluded a most satisfactory meal, she observed,

"You did not come out with me this afternoon, Mr. Arnold; that was very lazy; when are we to take our botanical ramble?"

"I am sure I don't know!" said he, which, as this was the first time he had heard of it, was not surprising.

"Do you often walk together, my dear," in-

quired her uncle, in some amazement, as he had never seen them do so.

"Not often," replied May, "for Mr. Arnold has not been here long, you know, but we enjoy it very much when we do."

The gentleman looked at her steadily, but uttered neither affirmation nor denial, he was simply trying to solve the problem as to what she could be at, which however puzzled him as much as the most abstruse proposition in conic sections, or the differential calculus could have done.

"It must make your residence in the country much more agreeable to have an active and lively companion," observed James Wildey in an under-tone to his cousin, to which observation she answered by a little side-ways nod, confirmative of his suggestion, and at the same time implying that her attention could not then be distracted from her other visitors.

"But now my cousins are come," continued she to Mr. Arnold, "you will not I am sure object to my giving them a part of my time; you will perhaps not find them a disagreeable addition to our walks, they can accompany us, at least, sometimes?"

"Oh certainly," said he, as the idea flashed on his mind, that she was laughing at the Wildeys in some way, and he determined not to contradict her. She looked triumphantly at James, and immediately proposed to leave the room. On returning to the library, where they always spent their evenings, Miss Wildey announced her intention of going up to unpack her clothes, and settle herself in her new abode; May remained for a short time alone, but Wildey soon quitted the other two gentlemen, and came in search of her. She was standing in the window, watching the fading twilight of a September sky; he immediately approached, and placing himself by her side, he took hold of her hand and said,

"I am so glad to find you alone."

"Indeed!" replied she, coolly scrutinising him over her shoulder, for she did not turn towards him, "may I ask what bad designs you meditate that you require solitude to put them in practice!"

"That idea is suggested solely by your conscience, my pretty cousin," replied he smiling, "you know you deserve punishment, and

naturally enough expect to receive it at the first opportunity."

"It will be a very great novelty, certainly," retorted she, "if I receive punishment from you, or any body else. I never was punished in all my little life, I can tell you."

"Then it's time you should begin," said he laughing, "before you are utterly spoilt by neglect."

"Thank you, cousin James; you are older than I am, and no doubt much wiser, but I have yet to learn that you have any authority over me."

"I never presumed to assert that I had, I look for nothing but influence, the influence of relationship and affection."

"Oh, yes," answered May, speaking in a sentimental voice, and hanging her head on one side, "we have an immense affection for one another; and our influence over each other is unbounded. Indeed, we are most amiable young people!"

"Why will you always answer in that ironical way," said he impatiently, "why can you not talk sense?"

"Really, I don't know, but there are some people to whom it seems no use to talk sense, James!"

"I want to know about this Arnold—what fortune has he?"

"This Arnold, why his face is his fortune I suppose; don't you think it a very handsome one, my dear cousin!"

"Has he nothing then?"

"I know you admire him, James, for I saw you at dinner trying to brush up your whiskers into the same shape as his; but it does not become you at all, you have not his fine brigand air."

"How can you be so absurd, May, I am positively ashamed of you!"

"You are too obliging, really; it does me a great deal of good."

"And you are bent on this preposterous match, although he has not a farthing; what do you mean to do when you are married?"

"Oh, be very obedient, affectionate and dutiful. I shall make *such* a wife."

"I mean, what shall you live on?"

"I have not settled; but I think on the earth, rather than in the clouds."

"Now don't, May!"

"Indeed, I should be most happy to oblige, you, James; but I do not see how I can help it at all."

"I do not believe there is another girl in the world who would talk such confounded nonsense as you do; I declare I will go back to London!"

She made no answer; only amusing herself with looking out at the clouds, with an air of happy composure which irritated him beyond anything.

"I say, May, do you hear me?"

"Yes, but I can hear you much better when you don't speak so loud; besides, it is much pleasanter; I do not like horrid harsh voices. That is one of the great beauties of Mr. Arnold's character, he very seldom speaks at all; and never raises his voice — unless when he is in a passion, and then he always explains his feelings in Turkish or Hindostanee!"

"May, have you quite forgotten all that passed when you were in London?" inquired he in a low, emphatic tone.

"What?" said she quickly, turning round to

him with crimson cheeks; the idea flashed on her mind that he had discovered her real engagement.

"I mean, all the pains I took to procure you a good establishment; I should think that was a sufficient proof of the interest I took in you; and if it failed at last, you cannot say it was my fault."

"Yes, I remember it all," said she, throwing back the curls from her face, and looking full at him. "I have a tolerable memory, James Wildey; and I perfectly remember the bargain which you concluded with me on the subject; yes—I own you felt a deep interest in my welfare when you expected to advance your own. You wished to sell my hand, without the smallest reference to anything, but the price to be paid for it."

"May! my dearest May, how unjust, how unkind you are! how can you talk in that way! to suspect *me!* I, who would give up everything in the world for your sake!"

"How much she must be obliged to you," said a voice, with a peculiarly ironical accent, just behind them. Both parties turned round a little surprised; it was Mr. Arnold, who had

entered the room without being heard by those whom he now startled, and who was standing contemplating them with a smile of impertinent curiosity.

"Pray, Sir, are you laughing at me?" exclaimed Wildey, stepping forward with much warmth.

"Yes;" said in the coolest accent possible, was his only answer.

"I will trouble you, Sir, to inform me what you see to laugh at in me?" retorted the irritated clerk.

"I would tell you directly, only that, as the laughing itself seems to make you so angry, it is probable the reason would be still more objectionable in your opinion."

"Sir, I consider this to be gross impertinence!" exclaimed Wildey, indignantly.

"Nonsense, nonsense!" cried May, putting her hand upon her cousin's lips, "how can you talk in that way, James? Mr. Arnold is only joking; I will have no quarrelling in my presence."

He pushed her hand away indignantly, and advanced a step before her; Arnold only laughed again; a low, sarcastic, provoking

laugh, and walking round to the other side of May, he grasped her arm, and said:

"Don't be afraid, my dear; we are not going to get up a duel; your cousin would be sorry for it if we did; and I should be ashamed of fighting with such a fellow as he; a cockney, who has never been farther from London than Littlemere in his life. No, no, in spite of your pretty face, we will have no duelling here."

"I am glad of it. I do not think my uncle would like fighting at all," replied May, a little excited.

"Well, well, don't be alarmed, Miss Luttrell, but at the same time, don't interfere in what does not concern you; it is no business of women to get in the way of duels, or stand between people who have affairs of honour to settle."

"I should think not," replied May, concisely.

"And as to you, my dear Sir," continued Arnold, blandly, turning to Wildey, "I would recommend you to keep your temper, at all events; and although it is no doubt unpleasant to be detected in making love to the *fiancée* of another man, even though she is your cousin,

yet depend upon it, it is never worth while putting yourself in a passion about it."

Wildey retreated back a few steps, eyed both parties gloomily for a minute, and then turning to the window, fixed his attention on the sky. May was almost as much puzzled as he was by this last speech; she could not contradict the fact that she was affianced, and yet as she knew, as well as Mr. Arnold, that he was not the individual, she did not precisely see what he meant by his assertion.

He walked to the fire and seated himself there; she followed him, and remained quietly standing opposite his chair, trying to make out from his calm, inexpressive features, some clue to his secret meaning. After about five minutes silence, Wildey abruptly quitted the room, and he was no sooner out of hearing, than May exclaimed:

"What made you say I was engaged, Mr. Arnold?"

"Because I thought it would be no harm to remind you of the fact, young woman, to check your flirtation with your cousin."

"But how do you know it to be a fact?" continued she.

"You cannot contradict it," was his only answer.

"My uncle had no business to tell you," said she, a little pettishly.

"Yes, he had. I wanted a wife, and asked him for your hand, as I thought you would suit me; he honestly told me you were already engaged; and I think I hardly did you any harm in what I said to that young fellow just now."

"I do not think you did; especially as he will certainly suppose that the engagement was to you," replied May, saucily. "I had no idea you had done me the honour of admiring me so much, Mr. Arnold."

"I think your cousin will suit me a great deal better," replied he, immediately, "she has twice your sense, and knows how to hold her tongue."

"Excellent qualities, and most desirable in your wife. I wish you success in your suit."

Arnold made no answer, and they remained quietly looking at the fire for a considerable interval; May was considering what her companion had said, and wondering what sort of lot his wife would have: she was divided between amusement and surprise. At length she

said that she hoped he would keep her secret, as she did not wish it to be published at present.

"I will say no more about it to any one, you may depend," was his reply, and closing his eyes, he was soon fast asleep.

CHAPTER VIII.

CLEOPATRA. Nay, pray you, seek no colour to your going
But bid farewell and go.

ANTHONY AND CLEOPATRA.

WILDEY, meanwhile, was venting his indignation in a quick walk by twilight around the place. The declaration of Arnold seemed to settle the matter, since May had not contradicted his assertion; and his, cousin with all her grace and beauty, was really going to marry that dull brute of a man, who seemed to care for nothing but his dinner, and had not spirit enough to resent another making love to his affianced bride, tamely considering it only as a joke.

His hasty footsteps were arrested by Mr. Luttrell, who seemed whilst sauntering slowly along, to be enjoying the croaking of his frogs in the neighbouring marsh.

"Are you taking a ramble, Mr. Wildey?" said he, as his visitor tried to pass him on the narrow foot-path, "if you will walk a little slower, I will go with you."

He could not very well refuse the offer, but was too sulky to speak.

"How do you like the place, Sir," inquired the host, presently.

"I have not seen it to be able to tell."

"It is not much to see at any time—rather flat and somewhat damp," observed the owner apologetically, "and it's a little dark now."

"Exactly so; it is your own, I think."

"Yes, Sir, yes; it was my father's, and shall be May's. I only wish she could keep the name with the place; but probably she will not. If she did not marry indeed! But then she would have no children, I suppose."

"She is engaged to Mr. Arnold, I understand," said Wildey, rather anxiously.

"Arnold! no, indeed! she is not going to

marry him, I assure you. He wished it, but there were objections, and I do not think he cared very much."

Wildey made no reply, he was too much surprised. He had never had an idea before that May was an heiress after all; she had always said she was portionless and dependent, and so, perhaps, in some sense she was. But to be dependent on a man like Mr. Luttrell, seemed the next thing to being her own mistress, and it greatly altered the state of the case if she was certainly to inherit her uncle's property. For him to follow his own inclination and marry her would not be such an imprudent thing; on the contrary, it might be made to answer very well. By good management, he could still make a fortune from his savings at the office and counting-house, and the sale or rent of Littlemere—for of course he could not live there himself—would make a pretty addition to his income.

Presently he was aroused from his reverie by his companion's remark:

"If you are going any farther, Sir, I must leave you. I have been already much beyond my usual limits."

"Oh, very well, pray do not let me incommode you. I intend to go to a considerable distance yet;" and Mr. Wildey, glad of the opportunity, quitted his host, and walked on alone.

Mr. Luttrell returned to the house and found the other three seated round the table, silently and intently employed in different ways. He also took a book and sat down without speaking; but their peace, though of considerable duration was at length abruptly broken in on by loud shouts from without. They were cries for help.

Up jumped the whole party in a hurry and rushed simultaneously to the door; the two gentlemen seizing sticks and pokers, the ladies arming themselves with the candles. Nanny was there also with the kitchen tongs in her hands.

"Bless us and save us!" cried she, "but they're murdering some one there; they'll be dead soon, if they are not already."

So saying, she threw open the door and looked out. The night was clear and starlight though there was no moon; but as they held the candles in their hands, it of course seemed intensely dark to them, when, as they gazed

through the open doorway. The gleam of the flaming light indeed fell on one small patch of the gravel, but all beyond seemed pitchy darkness. Still the cries for assistance were heard, and May, declaring it was James's voice, ran out unhesitatingly in the direction from whence it came, raising the candle above her head, in hopes of throwing some illumination on him. Arnold followed her, and Nanny ventured after him still armed with the tongs, which she valiantly snapped together, as if she had been playing castanets to no particular tune.

May, being best acquainted with the ground, and also rather the boldest of the party from feeling at home, advanced with the greatest readiness, and guided by the noise, pursued her way towards the pond behind the stables. A narrow foot-path, or rather causeway, traversed one corner of it for a distance of a dozen yards, and on reaching this spot, which was concealed from the house by the projecting corner of the barn, they immediately perceived that the object of their search was not far off. The light of the candle gleaming over the water showed them a dark object rising above the surface, and

clinging desperately to some railings which traversed the pond.

It appeared that in returning home in the dark, Wildey had in some way missed his footing on this narrow causeway, and fallen or rolled into the water. Here he was afraid to move, lest he should, in attempting to escape, only involve himself in deeper perplexities. His single idea had been to stay where he was, and shout for help; but now, guided by May's light, and encouraged by her voice, he ventured towards the bank, and succeeded in scrambling up it. May held out her hand to help him up, whilst Nanny clutched his coat-collar with the tongs, and very nearly knocked him down again, in her vehement efforts to be of use.

"Bless us! and why could you not keep on the path, Sir?" cried she, as he emerged from his watery seat; "my goody! how wet you are! It will be monstrous lucky if you do not catch your death this cold night. However, you could come for to go for to walk into that water, I am sure I cannot think. Was you overtaken, Sir, at all?"

"Dear James, are you hurt?" said his cousin,

quite affectionately. "Come in quick and change your things; how glad I am I heard you call!"

"And how much you must be obliged to us for coming out at night to help you. As sure as ever was, I thought they were robbing and murdering you. I never expected to find you alive," joined in Nanny.

Arnold, as soon as he saw where the young man was, had returned to the house; and, having given notice of the accident, Miss Wildey set about providing for her brother's personal comforts, in a way which gave the former a high opinion of her good sense and activity.

James Wildey was almost too cold, frightened and wet, to be able to answer his cousin, as they hurried along together, she leading him by the hand, that he might not again miss the path. On reaching the house, he immediately retreated to his own room; and, as he did not appear again that evening, it is to be presumed that he thought the best remedy for cold, and preventive of bad consequences, would be to go at once to bed.

At breakfast, the next morning, James Wildey did not appear much the worse for his accident.

Mr. Arnold amused himself with a variety of sarcastic remarks on his taste for trying the bed of the pond, and sundry witticisms relative to the cold-water system and the difference between hydropathy and hydrophobia; but the sufferer listened in imperturbable silence, eating his breakfast with composure and appetite. When the meal was over, he went up to his cousin, and asked her in an under tone to come out and walk with him, to which she assented after a little demur, on condition that he would not walk into the pond, or at least that, if he did, he would not expect her to accompany him in the excursion.

When out of the house, he at first asked her to show him the spot where he had met with the accident last night. She led him at once to the place.

"There," said she, "is your bath. Does it not look inviting?"

"How much I am indebted to you, May, dear!" said he, very tenderly taking her hand. "Perhaps I owe you my life."

"I hope I shall never have reason to repent it," said she, laughing lightly. "You know the superstition about saving a person's life."

"If that were possible—if there were any danger of my realising that fiction, I could wish you had left me to perish in the pond."

"Pretty and proper of you to say so, James," answered May, trying to extricate her hand from his, and rather anxious to avoid any approach to love-making and pathos; "but seriously, you must have been very much bent on a watery grave to have made it there. You were not in water above your ancles, and had you followed the guidance of those rails to which you clung, they would have brought you to shore at either end; so I cannot think your danger was so great, whatever your discomfort might have been."

"Great or small, I am indebted to you for my rescue."

"Perfectly true, perhaps; but as my exertions were confined to holding a candle to you, they were not likely to overpower my strength, or exercise my personal courage."

"You gave me your hand, May," said he, emphatically.

"Did I? Ah! I remember. I could do no less, as you tried to scramble up the bank; but, by the same token, you made mine dirty."

"And would you give it me again, my dearest May?" said her cousin, with a look she could not help understanding.

"I would lend it to you, if you needed my assistance; but I cannot part with it altogether. I shall want it for other purposes."

"Then I am more liberal than you, May; I would give you mine for life, if you would take it."

"Thank you; I will remember your generous promise, if ever I require to profit by it; meantime, suppose we walk on, as I really get chilled standing here."

"*You* chill me, May," replied he, trying to draw her hand under his arm.

"Don't talk nonsense, James. I have warned you before, I will have no love-making; so be so good as to be rational, or I will go home directly."

This exclamation, made with an air of perfect sincerity and calmness, did not afford much encouragement to a lover's suit; but Wildey was either very resolute as a suitor, or very ignorant of the nature of woman, for he would not yield to despair. Perhaps he remembered the words—

"He either fears his fate too much,
Or his deserts are small,
Who dares not put it to the touch
And win or lose it all!"

though I hardly think he was likely to have heard these old lines, or to have remembered them if he had. On he went, however, in his most winning way, bent on being heard and answered immediately.

"May, I am not joking now, nor will I be answered with a jest."

"That must depend upon my good will and pleasure, Mr. James Wildey," replied May, rather scornfully. "You will be answered in any way I please; and I warn you again, if you persist in choosing topics of which I disapprove, you will either receive a jest or a reproof as your only reply."

"But my happiness depends on this topic, and I cannot consent to remain unanswered now."

She was silent, only walking on rather quicker than before.

"In short, May, I love you, and you know it," continued he with warmth.

She neither spoke nor turned her head.

"Yes, my dearest, May, you do know that I love you dearly, and wish to make you my wife."

"So you are determined to speak, James!" exclaimed she, "although I warned you it would not be of the slightest use. I told you before, I was engaged, and I repeat it. If you will have a refusal, there it is. I wanted to spare you the trouble and mortification, but you are so obstinate. I decline your offer, not merely because I have no wish to be your wife, but because I am actually engaged to another."

"Engaged!—no, May, no, you are cruelly trifling with me," catching hold of her arm and confronting her; "I know this is not true, because I asked your uncle, and he told me that there was no foundation to your imaginary engagement."

He spoke with extreme agitation, and his face indicated feelings at once ruffled and excited.

"There is some little mistake there," replied she, coldly shaking off his hand and turning away; "my engagement, though as yet private, is not a clandestine one. My uncle knows it, and you cannot deny that I have warned *you* again and again of this. I shall go home."

She began to retrace her steps. He walked by her side for a minute in silence; surprise, irritation and disappointment filled his mind.

"I cannot believe it," at length he exclaimed with vehemence; "and, May, you must and shall explain this to me—you must tell me who is your lover, or I shall still believe you are deceiving me."

"Believe what you like; so long as I tell you I will not be *your* wife, I do not see why you should require farther explanation; at all events, you will not get it. I never yield to bent brows and threatening words, and you will extort nothing from me by following this fashion."

"You are barbarously unkind and unfeeling; I had not supposed it possible. You reject me without the least concern, regret or compassion. I may have been presumptuous in loving you, but still, I have loved you only too well for my own happiness, and offered you all I could."

"You should not have irritated me then, James; you ought to know that I will not be dictated to; you might have been more civil than to accuse me of falsehood, and then perhaps I should have been less angry and more sorry

for your disappointment. But what would b the use of softness or tenderly-turned sentences since I have to give, and you to take a refusa it is better that it should be done as quickly an decisively as possible."

"May, you do not, and cannot love, or yo would have more pity for my disappointmen If you knew what such a feeling is, you woul have tried to soften the blow that it migh wound me less. It may be right to kill a hope, but it is cruelty to torture whilst you kill.

"I beg your pardon. I did not mean to b unkind; but firm and resolute I must be. Yo have my best wishes, James, for your welfar and happiness, but you must seek it apart fro me. My lot is fixed, and no words of lov must be listened to now.

"Would that you had acted on this soone May, that you had afforded me less reason t delude myself with false hopes! you know tha I have a right to complain—that you hav encouraged an affection which you now coldl repel—that you have allowed me to fanc myself preferred. Not only here," con tinued he still more passionately, "for had yo not carried on the same system in London,

never should have come here at all; nay, when I look back, and remember your manners and conduct, I cannot but believe that your heart must have been favourable to me, or it must be of the hardest and most unfeeling nature."

"I suppose a rejected lover has a right to complain," said she, coolly, "so I will excuse your passionate rudeness."

"Do you love the man to whom you say you are engaged, May?" exclaimed Wildey, looking keenly in her face.

"I will not submit to such questioning," replied she, haughtily, and turning away her head.

Irritated by her manner, and forgetful of everything but his own disappointed hopes, Wildey placed himself across her path, and catching both her wrists in his hands, he exclaimed almost fiercely,

"Look me in the face, May Luttrell, and tell me that you never have loved me, and never wished to make me think so."

But hers was not a spirit to be daunted by violence, or intimidated by angry threats; she would not condescend to struggle where she

knew a struggle would be useless, against h superior strength. She stood quite still, on drawing up her head more proudly than befo but she was silent. He fixed his eyes on he and waited a minute for an answer, but it can not. She wished to look cool and unconcern but memory and conscience told her, that she h indeed entertained such a wish, that she had be desirous of securing a hold on his heart, th she had deliberately planned to excite the feelin from the warmth of which she now shran The blood rushed to her cheeks, her eyes f under his; she would have given much to ha been able to answer. "No, never!" but s could not speak a word.

"Answer me!" said he; the pressure of hands was like a vice upon her wrists; he d not mean to hurt her, but he was not consci how tight his grasp was.

"If you detain me here all day, I will n answer you when you treat me thus, nor shal be convinced of your love by your hurting arms so excessively. Let me go!"

He did release her, with a feeling of sha at his unmanly violence, the greater when

turned back her cuff, and shewed her wrists on which the impression of his fingers was plainly visible. She said nothing, but walked on; he continued silent also; a very few steps more brought them to the spot where he had fallen into the water the preceding night. She looked at the bank, at him, and then at her delicate arms, all red and swelled, but she kept silence, she was in no humour to reproach him. They entered the house together, there was no one in the library, to which she resorted; Wildey followed her, she took no notice of him; she would not even run away from him; but taking a bottle of *eau de cologne* from the chimney-piece, began bathing her wrists. His passion was gone now, and he was shocked, as he saw how he must have hurt her. He was an artful and unprincipled man, but he was not a brute, especially towards May, whom he loved as well as he could love anything; but he wanted the open candour which would have at once prompted him to apologize, to own he was wrong, to express his regret; he wished to say something, but he was ashamed, and did not feel certain what it would be best to do; so after waiting in hesitating silence for a few

minutes, he turned away, and again left the room and house. His intention was to return to London immediately, or at least to quit Littlemere, he would not stay longer under the same roof with May, and his first object must be to secure the means of escape.

May sat down in the library before a large volume, on which her eyes were fixed, but from which her thoughts were very far away. She was reviewing the past, and the consideration occasioned her no small share of regret; the gratification of her vanity which she had derived from the flirtation with her cousin, had been dearly paid for in the mortification she had subsequently experienced from the same source. She was vexed that she could not deny his accusations, and she owned to herself that she deserved this vexation. She would never flirt again—it was wrong, undoubtedly wrong; it was unwomanly and unjust to try to win affection, for which she intended to make no return, and in this case too, it had the additional evil of being extremely imprudent, for she had offended the man in whose power to a great extent, she had unfortunately placed herself; she should probably find in him an enemy

instead of a friend, a tyrant, instead of a slave.

But it could not now be helped, the mischief was done, and the next best thing was to consider what she could do to avert the inconveniences which might result from it. This was perplexing enough, for she had no idea how much her cousin would expect from her promise, and what his plans for the future would be. She hoped he would have the sense to go away for the present, it would be much the best thing for him to do, and would indeed be the only way to avoid all additional irritation. The announcement of her marriage would clear up all mystery, and perhaps when he discovered that she had in fact carried out his own plans, he might forgive the past, and forget his love to her. The latter, indeed, would probably soon be done, she did not rate a man's affection very highly, nor expect much constancy where there was no hope, she only supposed he would take to abusing women in general, and herself in particular, until he had the good luck to meet with somebody who would accept his hand, and cure his recent disappointment.

The morning past away, and May went about

her household duties, looked over her uncle's accounts, practised her music, and walked out with her cousin Ann; but saw no more of Wildey. He did not re-appear until a few minutes previous to dinner, and during that meal, as neither he nor his cousin was inclined to converse, a general silence prevailed.

At length Wildey spoke, turning to his host, he announced that an unexpected change in his affairs, made it necessary for him to leave Littlemere the next day, for which purpose he must start quite early, in fact, before breakfast, to catch the coach.

Mr. Luttrell was excessively surprised at this intelligence, for which he seemed perfectly unprepared; at first, he tried to persuade his visitor that his departure was quite unnecessary, next, that it was entirely impossible, and lastly, that it would be exceedingly unpleasant both to himself and everybody else. But his eloquence was wasted, and his guest was unpersuadable, quite ready to brave inconveniences, and impossibilities, in carrying out his determination. He had sent off a message to order a chaise, and it was to be ready before eight o'clock the next morning.

Miss Wildey, looking anxiously at her brother, inquired, naturally enough, whether she was to go with him, for she thought in that case she must pack up her things. Her brother had never thought about her, and hesitated as to his answer, but both May and Mr. Luttrell interposed with a remonstrance as to Ann's leaving them; there could be no occasion for that, the business which necessitated James' departure could not require hers; after coming so far, she must not hurry away, and they hoped to keep her for the next two months, at least.

Miss Wildey still looked at her brother, uncertain what to do, and wanting his permission before she ventured to make promises. He had not the least objection, he said coldly, she had much better stay; he should not require her at home; and on the strength of this gracious assurance, the affair was settled. Before they parted for the night, Mr. Luttrell, suddenly addressing his niece, observed that of course she would be up to make her cousin's breakfast the next morning.

A little embarrassed, she replied, "Oh, yes, of course, if he wished it."

Wildey interposed an objection, he could not

think of giving Miss Luttrell such unneccessary trouble; he could do perfectly well without any breakfast, or he could take it at the inn where he should meet the coach. But Mr. Luttrell was quite hurt at the idea, he could not hear of such inhospitality; it would be a disgrace to his house; May would be hurt as well as himself; she could not, he was sure, have a moment's hesitation as to attending him at breakfast; she was always up much earlier than that. He would have got up himself to see his visitor off, but early rising did not agree with him; it made him sleepy for the rest of the day; so he hoped to be excused.

"But mind you do," said he, to May; and she assented quietly.

May felt a little curious, as she was dressing the next morning, to know how the meeting would pass off. Her cousin had not shaken hands with her the night before, so she supposed him to be still angry, and probably their interview this morning would be a silent one. She ran down-stairs in a great hurry, when she fancied from the sounds in the next room, that he must be nearly ready; for she wished to obtain possession of the field; she thought it

would be much easier to encounter him if she were seated behind the coffee-pot and sugar-basin.

She tried to look perfectly calm and self-possessed when she heard his footstep; but she could not keep her cheeks from flushing deeply, and the consciousness of looking embarrassed, provoking as it was, quite deprived her of her usual ease of manner. She withdrew her eyes hastily after her first salutation, and began to busy herself about the cups and saucers. He sat down silently, took what she gave him, as if he were eating mechanically, and a profound peace seemed to brood over the breakfast-table.

Presently the chaise was heard driving up to the door. He started, looked at his watch, and remarked, as if thinking aloud, that it was early yet; but he rose at the same time.

"I wish you a pleasant journey, James," said his cousin, rising and holding out her hand to him. There was an evident struggle going on in his mind between pique and affection; he made no motion towards her, but she would not draw back.

"Shake hands before we part," said she,

earnestly; "we are cousins still; and whilst I forgive your violence yesterday, I am sure you will forgive any of my conduct which may have caused you pain. Is it not so?"

"I believe you have most to forgive," said he, in a low voice, taking her hand as he spoke and holding it. "I did not mean to hurt you, May; but you were not kind to me."

He stood looking at her wrists for a minute, and then added:

"I suppose we shall never meet again, but I hope you will be happy."

She did not entertain any such desponding ideas with regard to the chances of future intercourse, but she did not consider it necessary to contradict him; she only said:

"Good-bye!"

He kissed her hand two or three times, and then, running out of the room, disappeared within his chaise.

May had some scruples of conscience on the point as to whether she had not been too kind to him at last. But she had felt, as many others probably have done, that it is hard to say good-bye, and to part with one who seems sorry to

go, without expressing sorrow and kind feelings in return, even when the separation is in other respects a matter of indifference. They would probably meet again, she thought, before long, with what feelings, and in what circumstances, time only could show.

CHAPTER IX.

HERO. Help me to dress good coz; good Meg Ursula!

MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHI

THE party who remained at Littleme a very quiet one, and the conversation passed between them might be easily con within a couple of octavo pages of large and wide margin. Messrs. Arnold and I never talked unnecessarily, and Miss seldom spoke except in answer to some qu unless on very exciting occasions indeed as Mr. Arnold's upsetting the furnitur passion, or the appearance of a wandering travelling over the breakfast-table. C occurrence of such startling events, a lit clamation, or even a loud expression of

might be forgiven; and at all other moments, her conduct manifested a calm serenity most praiseworthy and agreeable. As to May herself, the only one of the party whose natural disposition would have induced her to give vent to her feelings in words, had they been of a lively nature, she was apparently suffering from a depression of spirits which kept her as silent and grave as her companions. The past and the future weighed on her mind, but she could hardly have given any distinct account of her sentiments, or have told whether doubt or security preponderated in her heart.

Thus September slipped away, and about the beginning of October Mr. Cameron's letters began to promise some change and variety. He talked of coming down to see May, to be introduced to her uncle, and to arrange the preliminaries for that important ceremony, which, in his own new and original form of expression, he trusted would make him the happiest of men. Miss Luttrell readily gave her consent to this visit, although there were two or three little circumstances which troubled her on the occasion. In the first place, her uncle always thought and spoke of Mr. Cameron

as of a young man, and May had not had th courage to undeceive him on that point. The she did not much like that her lover himse so wealthy and so used to luxury, should s the poverty of their establishment, and th meanness of their house and furniture. An lastly, it would require that she should once mo give up her own room, and betake herself t the uncomfortable closet and the borrowed be But May's was a happy temper, and one whic disposed her to meet these afflictions wi tolerable resignation, and which might ha enabled her to encounter still heavier ones, heavier ones there be, with hope and cheerfu ness.

Accordingly, she prepared to receive him wi a readiness which showed that her spirits we considerably excited by the prospect of a change whatever; and when the day arriv and Mr. Cameron came with it, she introduc him to her uncle with self-possession, althoug the look of astonishment with which he was r ceived was so great, that she was in momenta dread that Mr. Luttrell would exclaim "Ble me how old you are!"

Having escaped this danger, however, Ma

felt herself equally fortunate in the present and secure for the future, and she sat down and conversed with Mr. Cameron with a cheerfulness and a degree of respectful attention that gave great satisfaction to the gentleman himself.

Miss Wildey's comic astonishment when she learnt that her cousin had been engaged before she left town to Mr. Cameron, greatly amused May; it was a good while before the fact seemed perfectly comprehensible, but the sight of the beautiful ornaments and the splendid dresses which the suitor brought with him to his bride-elect, quite convinced her understanding not only of the fact itself, but of its great expediency and desirableness. These treasures spoke a language perfectly intelligible to her, and she gave most unqualified congratulations to May on the occasion.

Mr. Arnold's feelings on the subject were otherwise expressed. He surveyed the merchant when they first met with an air of great interest and a little surprise, but said nothing. But on the first opportunity when he found May alone, he suddenly began:

"So that old fellow is your lover, Mis May?"

"If you mean Mr. Cameron, I beg you wil speak of him and to me with respect, Mr Arnold," was her instant reply.

"Why, so I ought, as he is old enough to b my father," retorted he maliciously.

She made no answer.

"So I need not have had any scruples mysel on the score of age, when I was thinking o marrying you, Miss May," continued Arnold "unless, indeed, I was not old enough."

"That would have been objection enough i itself," replied the young lady, "besides I requir everything in proportion, age, riches, worth an talents; and you must feel that you would b very far short of my standard of perfection. I should certainly have refused you had you pro posed to me."

"Thank you, I am glad I saved you th trouble. But although I am ready to admit an inferiority in respect of years, to Mr. Cameron how can you tell I do not possess equal recom mendations, in the question of wealth and worth to that excellent old gentleman?"

"It is really a point on which I must confess the most profound ignorance," replied May carelessly, "I never troubled myself to inquire."

After a little pause, Arnold went on again.

"Although the fortunate suitability of your years may perhaps astonish beholders at first, the nature of the settlements when known, will at once explain the broad and solid basis on which this suitability is founded."

"You are welcome to draw your own conclusions, Mr. Arnold," said she, "so far as I am concerned; whether the expression of them thus openly, is perfectly polite and considerate, when the circumstances of where you are, and what you are here, are taken into account, I refer to your own judgment to decide; and for that purpose I shall leave you alone at this moment."

May knew perfectly well that she was not in love with Mr. Cameron, and she never attempted to pretend even to herself that she was so. But his many good qualities commanded her respect, and his regard for herself excited some feeling of gratitude, and so did his magnificent presents. She treated him accordingly with great

deference, and never indulged her spirits, or h
love of teazing at his expense. Indeed she h
not much temptation to vex him; he was
very kind and indulgent to her; every wish w
to be complied with, every taste consulted, eve
fancy indulged. As she could not live in t
city, the finest house in Hyde Park Garde
was to receive her as its mistress; and wh
she had settled on the colour she would pref
for the hangings in the drawing-rooms, orde
were instantly despatched to prove his co
pliance with her desires. If she did not fi
the new carriage and horses to her taste,
should change them until she suited herself,
he had already secured for her personal atte
ant a first-rate *femme de chambre*, skille
perfection in the mysteries of the toilette,
said by the lady who recommended her not
to dress hair like an angel, but to mak
gowns like a Parisian milliner.

What more could the heart of woman
or expect; and when to this was added
liberal allowance, and the promise of
that was not sufficient for her wants, wh
doubt the devotion of such a lover, or t
piness attending on such well-omened

The gentleman's wishes were to celebrate the marriage early in November, and since the thing was to be done, and she had no serious objection to propose to this arrangement, May consented, and henceforth her meditations were turned to the all-important matter of the *trousseau*. The ceremony itself, since it was to be performed at Littlemere, might not require much show and *éclat*, indeed it hardly admitted of any, considering the nature of the neighbourhood, and the probable scarcity that would exist both of guests and spectators. Under such circumstances, May was as entirely convinced that much display would be useless, as her lover was that it would be unsuitable and disagreeable. But this did not obviate the necessity of having a newly and elegantly furnished wardrobe; there could be no doubt about that, the only question was how to procure it, without inconvenience to her uncle. This dilemma was obviated by Mr. Luttrell's kindness, and in the following way.

"My dear May," said he, taking her into the little closet which contained a number of boxes, old boots, walking sticks, and other such lumber. "I want to talk to you!"

"I am quite ready to listen, uncle!"

"Well, my dear, since you are going to marry this Mr. Cameron, who certainly is much older than I expected, which does not of course matter to me, and as he is going to settle fifty thousand pounds upon you, it does not matter whether I settle anything on you or not."

"Oh, no, indeed dear uncle, not the least, I need take nothing from you, and I am sure you have not too much for your own comfort."

"Very well, my dear, but as for all that, you will want wedding clothes, and I understand from Miss Wildey, no respectable young woman can be decently married without them, for I consulted her about it, I shall just give you this money, for that purpose, out of hand. Look here, my dear, I have saved five hundred pounds, which I always meant for your portion, if you had married a poorish sort of man, for then you know it would have been something, but now you see it is just nothing by the side of Mr. Cameron's fifty thousand, not worth speaking of; but still, it will do well enough to buy the ribbands and laces which your cousin says are indispensable, so take it, my dear, and

spend it as you like," and as he spoke he put into her hands notes to this amount, which he drew from a tin box in one corner of the closet.

"My dearest uncle," exclaimed May, putting them back with her hands, "and are these all your savings for these many years, which you offer to me?"

"Yes, my dear, all; why, you see, I could not well save more, or I would, and you should have that too; but I am not rich, and what with the farm, and Nanny's expense, and yours, my dear, and altogether, I had a great call on it; but ever since you came to me, fourteen years ago, I thought you would want some little matter of money some day—but it is really *all*, quite all I have."

"I did not mean to doubt that," cried May, quite touched by his manner, "but indeed I cannot take it, uncle, indeed I cannot, when I am to be so rich, it would be a downright robbery; oh, I would not do such a thing."

"But, my dear, it is all yours, I have regularly put it by for you, and always reckoned it as yours, and I could not on any consideration

spend it on anything else, take it, and say no more about it, there's a good girl. I only wish it was more, for your sake."

May could not however accept it, and tried hard to persuade her uncle to apply his hoards to other purposes, she would take one hundred as a wedding present she said, but whilst so much was wanted to make his house comfortable, she really would not appropriate the whole sum.

Her uncle, however, was impracticable, he wanted nothing himself, and now he should want still less; he believed Arnold meant to live with him in future, they agreed very well together, and Arnold who had plenty of money intended to go shares in the house-keeping, and help in the farm. On the whole, he should, he knew, be very comfortable and want for nothing. May yielded, in appearance, but protested in secret against any such selfish appropriation of her uncle's savings. She resolved to keep a portion for her own use; but at the same time she determined to spend the greater part in purchasing such comforts in the way of carpets, chairs and other furniture, but especially such a supply of books, as would make her uncle happy for life.

For this purpose, she resolved to consult Mr. Cameron, as she thought on his return to London, he would help her to carry out her wishes. To him therefore she stated the case, and he cordially coincided in her views; promising to employ all his skill and judgment in the choice of such articles as she suggested, and engaging to send them to her with the least possible delay.

As to her *trousseau*, it may be edifiying to the reader to mention, that Grace Dunsford readily undertook to give the necessary orders, at some one of the wedding and outfitting warehouses, who undertake to supply these important occasions, on the shortest conceivable notice, with all the necessaries of civilized society; and that when her laces, lawns and muslins were all settled, and sent down to her, they really gave her perfect satisfaction.

Mr. Cameron returned to London, after a visit of a week, and everything continued to progress favourably, when about the middle of October, a new and most unexpected obstacle presented itself to the projected wedding. This was nothing less than a sudden declaration from Miss Wildey, that she should not be able to act

the part of bride's-maid, on the interesting occasion, because she had just promised Mr. Arnold to become his bride on that very day.

Here was a perplexing dilemma for a young lady in such a situation, or rather for two young ladies. Two brides, and never a bride's-maid! let any well educated young woman, versed in the important mysteries of etiquette and propriety, and looking forward with modest confidence, to being followed by a train of six or eight elegant girls to the matrimonial altar, judge of the distress of my heroine on this trying occasion. To be without those accompaniments to a wedding which are scarcely less necessary than a bride-groom, a priest, or a wedding gown, might well perplex the brightest intellect, and try the merriest temper. Had May gone into despair, or hysterics on the occasion, we might almost have excused her. Yet, she did neither, she merely burst out laughing, and asked her cousin whether they should dress Nanny in white muslin, and let her act on the occasion.

"I am sure I don't know," said Miss Wildey despondingly, "I told Mr. Arnold we had much better wait, because then I could go home first

and he could come after me; but he said that would not suit him, he did not mean to move at all; but just to marry and stay here; that your uncle had agreed to it, and thought it would be very comfortable. And as to going to London, that was a useless expense and trouble, of which he would not hear, and so indeed it would, he is right there. And so we must marry here, it seems."

"Then I suppose it cannot be helped," said May, quietly.

"But we cannot marry without bride's-maids, you know," continued Miss Wildey, "and I am sure I don't know any, or what to do."

"I do not see that it would signify the least in the world," said May; for she did not always judge of points of etiquette in the same way as girls who, from seeing more of the world, are of course better informed on such important matters. "Sponsors are necessary at baptism, I know, but I do not think the rubric says anything about bride's-maids, and so, possibly, if unattainable, they may be dispensed with."

"But it would look so odd, my dear; nobody

ever heard of such a thing as a young lady going to church to be married without any female friend. People would talk so much of it."

"I am not afraid of that, indeed, Ann, partly because, as we go together, it cannot be said we go alone; and partly because, as there is nobody in the neighbourhood, I do not think there will be much talking; and partly because, if there were as many tongues as there are geese, and they all spoke at once, I should probably hear nothing of their discourse."

"Still I don't like it at all," persisted Miss Wildey; "for my old friends in London will be sure to ask about it when they see me, and they would be so surprised when they hear of my having no bride's-maids."

May considered a little, and then said:

"Very well, Ann, I will tell you what we can do; we will ask the two Miss Cokers to be the bride's-maids, and I will give them a new gown a-piece upon the occasion."

"Oh—as you please—that is, if you think right; but the Miss Cokers are not ladies, are they?—only farmer's daughters?"

"I should not mind that the least; and if

your friends in London hear of their names, they are not likely to hear of their father's occupations unless you tell them; so keep your own counsel and they will know nothing about it."

Miss Wildey submitted; the invitation to the Miss Cokers was given and acccepted along with the new dresses, and there were no more difficulties in their path.

On his return to town, Mr. Cameron at last communicated to Wildey his intentions with regard to matrimony in the following way.

"Wildey, my good fellow, I have been out of town; I have been down to Littlemere myself."

"Indeed, Sir," exclaimed the clerk, a little startled at the announcement, and not very well knowing what else to say.

"And I saw your cousin, Miss Luttrell," pursued the merchant.

"Then, perhaps," said Wildey, feeling he was expected to say something, and at the same time being rather incommoded by certain recollections which were unpleasantly connected with his cousin's name, "then perhaps, Sir, you have not altogether given up the plan

we once talked of with regard to that youn lady."

"My dear Wildey, you are I know muc interested in my welfare, and you deserve m confidence; and now that I can speak openl you shall know all. I have been engaged t your cousin ever since she left London, and w are to be married on the fourth of next montl She did not wish it talked of to any on neither did I, until the time approached, and yo are really the first person to whom I hav told it."

The length of this speech gave Wildey tim to recover from the perplexity of feelings whic it created; and by a strong effort of self-contro he succeeded in hiding the various emotion which would have been unwelcome or dis agreeable to his employer. He contrived t utter his congratulations on the occasion witl sufficient steadiness to deceive Mr. Cameron though had May been present, she would hav perceived how strong were the emotions witl which he was struggling. Mr. Cameron went o to tell his clerk all his plans, to enter int particulars relative to his new house and es tablishment, and to make arrangements as t

the changes which must ensue in consequence of his removal from his present position. He talked on with much complacency, very little aware of the storm of contradictory feelings which was raging in his hearer's breast. He and his bride were to go to Hastings, Brighton, the Isle of Wight, and possibly farther west, before they returned to take up their residence in Hyde Park Gardens. She wished to travel a little; and although the time of year was unfavourable, still he hoped they might enjoy themselves, if they had at all tolerable weather, and she did not catch cold or overtire herself.

At length, Wildey was left to himself and his own reflections, and allowed time to arrange his plans and purposes. On leaving Littlemere, he had not returned to town, until his week's leave of absence had expired, but had gone down to Dover, and skulked about there until the day fixed for his return to London. He was very much mortified by what had passed in Lincolnshire; the disappointment of his affection with regard to his cousin was quite equalled by the pain which his selfish vanity occasioned him; and, as he had really left her with the conviction that she was engaged to that detestable Arnold,

whom he considered so much his own inferior in every respect, he had felt dreadfully sore and angry on the subject.

How she could with her eyes open have preferred such a man—a plain, silent, selfish, middle-aged man to himself, with his good looks, well-bred manners, insinuating address and years in fair proportion to her own, he could not possibly imagine. But now the enigma was explained: it was Mr. Cameron's wealth that had carried the day against him. In fact, it was his own influence which had settled the point; she was merely doing his bidding, acting on his plans, working out his fortune; and perhaps she was all the time not insensible to his own merits; the variation in her manners, the kindness and caprice which had tormented him, might originate after all, in an affection to himself, struggled against and sacrificed at his command, and to his welfare. This was consolatory; and then, too, from the moment of her marriage, she became his tool, his slave; his power would be paramount—she would rule her husband, and he would rule her. His prospects were again smiling; wealth and importance were again within his grasp, and power

over his enemies too; he would soon complete his triumph over Ashton and Dunsford, and with such a prospect he could well afford to postpone his love for a season. The course of nature would certainly release her in time, and then he should be able to put the keystone to his fortunes by marrying her himself. Such was again his plan, and to carry it out in perfection must henceforth be his study.

November came, and so did all the new furniture from London; and the arrangement of the warm Turkey carpet, the large leathern chairs, the soft sofa, and the heavy, air-excluding crimson curtains, gave May as much satisfaction as anything else connected with her marriage. Her uncle looked delightfully surprised, and yet perfectly comfortable, at the changes she had effected. The books were not yet ordered, Mr. Cameron having suggested that they should wait until she could herself select them—he knew so little about such things.

It was really a comfort to May to feel that she did not leave her uncle to the unfeeling selfishness of old Nanny. Mr. Arnold kept that tyrant in capital order, and was apparently determined not to let the reins slacken. Miss

Wildey would make a most attentive house-keeper, and Arnold, arousing himself from his former torpidity, seemed bent on making the old place comfortable and tidy. The gate was now in its place, and moving easily on its hinges; the barns and stables were under repair, the garden was stocked with all that the season admitted, and drained, dug and manured in a way which had been long unknown there. All these changes did not discompose Mr. Luttrell in the least; they might add to his comfort, but they gave him no trouble now; he could read and play as well as ever, and though he fancied the new curtains and carpets rather deadened the sound of his music, they had some advantages to counterbalance this evil.

Then there was an active man employed in the stable and garden, and a neat, cheerful lass to assist in the household work, and all promised well for comfort and respectability; and if Mr. Arnold did make himself master of his friend's house, it was not usurping that friend's place, for he had never held it; it was only deposing Nanny from her unjust authority, and putting a more efficient agent in her situation.

In consequence of these arrangements, May

felt far less regret at quitting her old home than could have been expected; and though she cried a little the night before, she saw her wedding-day arrive with tolerable composure. It all went off very well. Miss Wildey had succeeded, after a great deal of fidgetting and fussing, in getting her wedding-gown properly made, an important point, which gave rise to not a few sarcastic observations on the part of Arnold. These observations were utterly unheeded by his fair lady, whose rule of right on the occasion seemed to be confined to what everybody did, or what anybody would think, two important points which involved too many contradictions, doubts, difficulties and absurdities for anyone but Miss Wildey herself to reconcile and arrange. Fortunately, hers was a mind that no contradictions disturbed, and no metaphysical or philosophical difficulties could perplex: too many plaits in the corsage of her gown might derange her equanimity; that was within her comprehension; but the impossibility of doing as everybody else did, was completely beyond her; because, as she invariably answered, it was no use talking, one must do as everybody else did, because if one did not,

everybody would think it so strange, and o
would get laughed at, and everybody knew h
disagreeable that was.

Perhaps it was the consequence of her
termination not to be original, nor to suffer a
of her companions to be so either, that t
double marriage proved a very dull, quiet, i
sipid sort of affair; scarcely any show, and
little to mark it, that not only was there nothi
worth recording, but Mrs. Arnold herself
clared she positively hardly knew whether s
was married or not, until the moment wh
she saw Mrs. Cameron set off in her n
carriage, and found herself mistress of Litt
mere in her stead.

CHAPTER X.

MIRANDA. My affections
Are then most humble, I have no ambition
To see a goodlier man.

TEMPEST.

WHAT were the exact nature of the young bride's feelings, when she drove off with her husband from the home which had so long sheltered her, it would be difficult to define. I believe for the first five minutes her heart failed her, and she felt that could she have broken the bond she had just formed, and once more set herself free—the gayest of worlds and its treasures, the fairest of hopes and its visions, the strongest of wishes, and the certainty of realisation, should not have tempted her to do

it again. But these ideas were altogether too unpleasant to be welcomed or courted. The thing was done; she was married, and it only remained for her to make the best of it, enjoy herself as much as possible, and behave properly to her husband. She stole a glance at him as she sat there, and the sight of his kind, good-natured face, reminded her that in some points she was very fortunate; if she did not love her husband, she could at least respect him, and as she loved no one else, and he seemed so very fond of her, no doubt they should get on very well together. It was certainly better than passing the rest of her life at Littlemere without aim, or stimulus, or variety; she should have plenty to amuse her, and should now be sure of respect, admiration, and attention when she appeared in society. Her reflections were more natural than coherent or methodical, and her mind ran on from one subject to another, without resting long upon any one.

She turned to her husband, and began conversing with him on the appearance of the country, and the state of the crops; he seemed glad to find that she was equal to talking calmly; he had fancied that whilst she was looking out

of the window she was crying; he had an idea that brides always cried, and his only difficulty was what to say to comfort her. It of course was quite right to shed tears, but it was awkward, and he was seriously meditating on whether or not he should take out the 'Times,' at which he had as yet found no leisure to look, or whether she might not be expecting some little attention on his part, such as wiping her eyes, perhaps, or begging her to compose herself. He did not know much of young girls, and he felt awkward at beginning these elegant gallantries. It was, therefore, a very great relief to him, when she turned round with dry eyes, and a cheerful smile, and remarked that the turnips seemed much injured by the fly this year. He had always thought her a sensible girl, but now he was convinced of her mental superiority, for he did not know what the fly was, and, indeed, was no judge of crops of any sort.

May did not find the first week of her married life at all dull; she was passionately fond of the beauties of nature, and the sea having all the charm of perfect novelty to her, she thought she should never tire of it. She had

only to propose a plan or an expedition, h husband was ready to acquiesce, and what wit the new things she saw every day, the visits t celebrated places, the reading-rooms, the li braries, the beach, the bathing, and then th rapid changes to some other town, she had a much amusement as any one could desire, and not a moment for *ennui* or discontent.

They passed from Hastings along the coast to all the other watering-places, stopping a hour, or a day, or several days, just as Mr Cameron's fancy dictated, and they met wi neither accident nor adventure of any ki until they landed on the Ryde Pier, determi to make a tour of the Isle of Wight, bef they bent their steps towards London.

The mildness of the climate, and the pi turesque nature of the scenery of the Undercl enchanted May, and she declared she had h a mind to spend the winter there, an announc ment which horrified her husband, when h thought of his business in London, and his ne house in Hyde Park Gardens. He promise however, to remain a few days here if she like and they established themselves accordingly i the Hotel at Ventnor.

The afternoon of their arrival, they went down together to the sea, and although Mr. Cameron complained a good deal of the roughness and discomfort of walking on the beach, May made herself so agreeable, and was really so merry and happy, that he allowed her to go as far as she pleased. They sat down on a rock in a nice sheltered nook, May took a book she had carried, Mr. Cameron began to peruse the morning's paper; the tide was flowing softly and gently, and presently the gentleman noticing its approaches, drew back to a higher part of the beach, and begged of his wife to come too. But May was wilful, and persisted in sitting where she was, she knew there could be no danger or difficulty in retreating at any time, and she like to see the water flow round her.

He made no further remonstrance, but returned to the study of his paper; she could not fix her attention on the book, but began idly throwing stones into the water; then she got up, laid down the volume on the rock, slipping off at the same time, a beautiful bracelet, to place between the pages as a mark, and began trying how far she could proceed out into the water, by stepping from one large stone to

another. She took a childish pleasure in doing what seemed a little dangerous, it was her nature to venture rather farther than prudence would have advised, it was her fault that she loved to linger near a temptation, and demonstrate her strength and skill in extricating herself from the difficulties in which such conduct involved her.

In this way she continued advancing, and she did not return to the shore, until after having made a considerable circuit, quite forgetting, with her usual thoughtlessness, the book and bracelet, she had left on the rock. When she came to look for them, she found that owing to the flowing of the tide they were now beyond her reach, and she did not know what to do.

"Oh, Mr. Cameron," cried she in great distress, "how am I to get to that book, come here, pray come and help me."

Her good-natured husband hastened to her side, but he could not reach the treasure; and it seemed as if every wave must cover, and perhaps bear it away.

"Oh, my bracelet," cried May, "my pretty topaz bracelet, I do not like to lose it at all; you could get it, if you would just take two

steps into the water, I am sure you might do that!"

"How can you be so imprudent, my dear child," was his answer, "I do not like to wet my feet at all, I am very sorry."

"What shall I do then?" exclaimed she in despair, "positively I must walk through the water myself!"

"Can I help you?" said a soft voice close by her side. "Is it that book?—allow me!—" and without another word the speaker coolly stepped into the sea, which was about mid-leg deep, and rescued the book and bracelet.

"Oh, thank you, a thousand times, thank you," cried May, looking with grateful admiration at the incognito. He was a handsome and fashionable looking young man, whose appearance would have excited attention at any time, and now combined with the obligation which he had just rendered her, could not fail of arousing very rapturous emotions.

Mr. Cameron expressed his fears that the gentleman was wet, and strongly recommended him to return home, and change his clothes, but he did not appear to think much of the water, shaking it off his trousers, and saying it

was a trifle. This was very gallant, certainly, and made him appear interesting, but since it was November, and not a very warm day, it could hardly be considered very true; and May was so urgent on this particular point, that the stranger could not long resist her importunities, especially when he found they were all living at the same hotel, and that the Camerons were going home there at once.

Accordingly they all walked up there together, and only parted at the door, May saying with more sincerity than consideration, that she hoped they should see him again.

"What a very handsome man," cried she, as soon as they were in the sitting-room, "I never saw so graceful and elegant a person, can you guess who he is, Mr. Cameron?"

"Not in the least, my dear," said he looking up from his paper, the reading of which he had resumed.

"Did you ever see any one so good looking?" continued the young bride.

"Yes, often, I don't think him so particularly striking; well enough, but rather too dandyish for me. I don't like your fine gentlemen, May!"

"Oh, but I do," cried she, not remarking the slight tone of pique in her husband's voice, which indicated a little annoyance at her admiration of this young stranger. "I always like to see handsome men, and he is the best looking I ever saw, much better than James Wildey."

Mr. Cameron made no answer.

"I hope we shall see him again," continued she.

Still, no reply from her husband.

"Do put down that tiresome paper, and answer me," said May, who was lounging on a sofa, with her back towards Mr. Cameron. "You will go and call on him, and thank him for his trouble."

"I did thank him, and so did you May, and that's enough."

"Enough for him, I dare say, but not enough for me! I want to see more of him, and that would be a good way of managing it."

"I don't want it managed!"

May raised her head, and looked at her husband. He was looking annoyed; she was sorry for it, but she did not exactly understand why; it did not strike her that her violent admiration of any young man could be vexatious to her

elderly husband, she had no wish to teaze him, but then she did not wish either to give up her own way; there was a short struggle in her mind, between duty and pleasure, she hesitated, and then said, "I am sure we are not always so lively, as to have occasion to underrate agreeable society, or to shrink from having another added to our party; at least, I for one should rejoice at the variety."

Mr. Cameron again took up the paper, and read in silence; she wanted him to answer, she was just in a humour to wish to be contradicted, and determined to make him speak, she said hastily, "Perhaps you are afraid that I should find the contrast too agreeable."

She was shocked at herself the moment after, when all that this little speech implied rushed into her mind, she really had not meant it; she had spoken without thought; she looked up rather fearfully at her husband, to see whether he would be angry, or what he would do. He did not speak, or raise his eyes from the paper, but he changed colour, and reddened deeply even to the crown of his head, as she could plainly see through his thin hair. She wished he would look up, or speak, she wanted him

picked up in this way; company with whom I would not trust my beautiful and innocent wife. And much as I wish to amuse and please you, I wish to take care of, and guard you safely, still more. So you must forgive a caution, which may seem tiresome when it opposes your inclinations, on consideration of its motive."

This was the way to touch May's heart, and subdue her entirely.

"You make me ashamed of myself, Mr. Cameron," said she, as the tears started into her eyes, and her whole expression softened with regret at having wounded his feelings. "You are so much better than I; you ought to have scolded me well, instead of speaking so kindly."

"No, May, I hope we shall do without scolding, you are too sensible to need that; but you are young still, and must trust a little to my superior age and experience. I would not check you in any pleasure in which you can safely indulge."

"It was not that I meant," replied the wife, "I am young and foolish, I admit, but not so young, or foolish, as to be ignorant of my duty to you, and I am sorry I said what I did just now; I did not mean it at all; the words slipped

out, as mine often do, without my thinking what they meant, and I am so sorry; I would often give worlds to recal what I have said, when it is too late; and that is the case now!"

"Say no more about that—there is no need to refer to it—let by-gones be by-gones, May, we must each make allowances for the other; and perhaps after all you may have the most to make."

May passed the afternoon in writing a letter to Grace Dunsford. She was looking forward to meeting her with great pleasure, she wrote in high spirits on this occasion, and after describing the scenery she had travelled through, her ecstacy at the sea, and her delight in moving about, ended with declaring, that after all, nothing past or present could give her so much pleasure as the sight of Grace's own dear smiling face, always provided she had kept her good looks, and were not grown older or plainer in the last four months.

Meanwhile, Mr. Cameron had gone down to the coffee-room for a little diversion, and there the first person he encountered, was the individual of whom they had been talking upstairs. The stranger did not look at all less

handsome, or less elegant, than at the meetin
in the morning, and Mr. Cameron could n
wonder at May's admiration. He remembere
however, that let the contrast be what it migh
his wife must get hardened to the sight
gentlemen, both younger and handsomer tha
himself; it would be impossible to prevent h
meeting many such, and it would therefore
the height of folly to shrink from allowing h
such intercourse, or to give way to jealou
every time she expressed admiration for anothe
He must trust to her own principles, and sen
of right; if these were not strong enough
keep her fancy and feelings in proper order,
watchfulness on his part could do it. At
events he would not mistrust her; his hono
was now in her keeping, and he believed t
surest way to secure it, was to place implic
confidence in her integrity.

Actuated by these motives he again enter
into conversation with the stranger, and aft
discussing politics and the state of the natic
slightly, Mr. Cameron inquired if he mig
know the name of the individual whose co
versation thus enlightened him, telling him
the same time his own, and mentioning h

occupation and residence. His companion presented him with his card, on which was engraved, Captain Valentine Mountsteven, 1st. Dragoon Guards.

This was satisfactory, as far as his station in society and profession were concerned, and Mr. Cameron was sufficiently well pleased with the information to return a very gracious acquiescence when Captain Mountsteven requested permission to visit the young lady whom he had met in the morning.

During this conversation, a third person approached them and, seizing the first convenient pause, he claimed Mr. Cameron's attention as an old friend. He was a middle-aged man, with much such a business-like, unpretending air as the former gentleman himself; and Captain Mountsteven guessed him to be a brother merchant, especially from some sentences which he heard about the health of his youngest daughter, London air, Exchange, Free-trade and Money-market. The interruption was by no means disagreeable in calling off Mr. Cameron's attention from himself; and he mentally determined to take advantage of the

permission given him, to wait on the young lady, whose beauty had struck him so much, and whose company he thought he should prefer without her old husband's society.

Mr. Cameron had told him the number of their room, and possessed of this knowledge, he sallied out on his adventure. May was just preparing to seal her letter, for which purpose she had rung the bell for a candle. The servant reached the door at the same moment as the Captain, so the latter gave him his card, and desired him to say that this gentleman requested leave to wait on her.

Instinctively, May guessed who was the owner of the card, but she did not very well know what to say or do. Her husband's cautions and her own curiosity struggled for a moment; but the point was decided by the gentleman's entrance, without waiting for further permission. She looked a good deal embarrassed and more than half angry, at what she considered an intrusion; and she would have speedily expressed her sense of his visit, had not a consciousness of ignorance as to what good manners allowed, kept her silent. Perhaps he might

know that he was doing nothing out of the common way, or which called for particular reprehension or remark.

He did not leave her much time for doubt; but immediately explained that he had met Mr. Cameron down stairs, had made his acquaintance and received his permission to visit her; and as the old gentleman was now engrossed by the conversation of some old and respectable friend, he had hurried away to avail himself of this great privilege.

May smiled, and said she was glad Mr. Cameron had met with some acquaintance—it would serve to amuse him.

Captain Mountsteven, who was perfectly aware that she was Mr. Cameron's wife, replied with great suavity, that gentlemen of the age of her respected father, always enjoyed a chat with old friends.

"My father!" repeated May, colouring a good deal; "Mr. Cameron is not my father."

"I beg pardon—I see there is no likeness. Then he is, I presume, your guardian or uncle?"

"He is my husband," said she, composedly, and looking full in her visitor's face.

"Your husband!" repeated he, with an air of

great astonishment. "You misunderstand me, surely: I mean the old gentleman who was walking with you this morning."

"And so do I," replied May, looking half-angry with him.

"Are you fond of the water, Mrs. Cameron?" said he, suddenly changing the subject; "I mean sailing on it."

"I never tried at all; the only vessel I ever was in, is the Ryde steamer."

"My yacht is at Cowes, and though the season is rather late, and I was thinking of laying her up for the winter, yet if the weather continues as mild as it is now, it would not be unpleasant sailing. Would you like to try?"

"Oh, I think I should, if Mr. Cameron did not object. Of all things a sailing vessel looks to me most graceful, and I always long to be on board when I see them gliding through the water."

"Well, then, we will have a sail together. When shall you be at Cowes?"

She could not tell, as their plans were unsettled; but she rather thought wherever she wished to go, there they should go.

"You are commander-in-chief, then?" said

he, with an air she fancied both impertinent and supercilious.

"I do not understand you," she replied with a haughty look.

"I only meant, that from your speech, I concluded you to be the supreme head of affairs in your domestic policy—the ruler, as you ought of course to be."

"Oh!" said she, dwelling a little upon the monosyllable; then adding, "Mr. Cameron is excessively kind to me, and generally allows me to do as I please; but if business should require his presence in London, of course I could not interfere or detain him here."

"But if business required his presence, it could hardly make yours necessary. I presume you do not superintend Mr. Cameron's counting-house, or manage those city affairs for him."

"If Mr. Cameron's business made it necessary to go to town, it would be mine, as his wife, to accompany him."

At this moment, the servant returned with the lighted candle, and May desired him to wait whilst she sealed her letter, that he might take it to the post. Her visitor silently watched her pretty hands and fingers sparkling with

jewels, as she went through this process; but when the elegant little seal had been pressed and the letter consigned to the servant, who carried it off, he resumed the conversation, whilst May, leaning on the writing-desk in front of her, trifled with her gold pen and the other little articles in the escritoire.

"Then I may expect the pleasure of your company some day; you will honour my little 'May-Queen' with your presence."

"Thank you; I will talk to Mr. Cameron about it."

He tried two or three other subjects, but not very successfully; the pretty young wife—and she certainly was the prettiest woman he had seen for a long time—did not seem to listen with anything like the satisfaction, deference, or admiration with which she ought to have attended to him. Captain Valentine Mountsteven was a very fashionable man in London. Heir to a title, and owner of a large property already, handsome, elegant, and just sufficiently dissipated to be *interesting* and *piquant*, his notice of any young woman had been generally received with gratitude as a favour, and he was accustomed to consider himself conferring dis-

tinction on those with whom he condescended to converse.

Mrs. Cameron's wonderful indifference of course arose from ignorance of their relative positions; it was not to be expected that a girl from the fens of Lincolnshire should appreciate his vast superiority, or understand the favour he was doing her in seeking amusement in her society. But her carelessness and innocence were new and amusing. He would make himself agreeable to her; she should treat him differently before long; and he was not so clever a man as he believed himself to be, if they parted at Cowes without a strong wish on her part to renew the acquaintance in London.

With these resolutions, he soon took leave, partly because he fancied she wished him gone, and he would not weary her of his first interview, and partly because he thought it best to go before Mr. Cameron himself returned to his room.

May told her husband on his return, who had been there, and all that he had said, and referred the decision as to the sailing in the yacht to him. His answer was, that she might do as she liked; if the weather continued

favourable, he saw no objection, and he should like her to enjoy a pleasure which would have all the charm of novelty, and which he would not have thought of proposing.

"I should like the sailing very much," said May; "my only doubt about it is whether I should like going with that Captain Mountsteven."

"I thought you admired him, May."

"So I did before I had spoken to him; but I am not quite so sure about it now. There is a something in his tone and voice, in his look and manner, that I do not quite like—I cannot tell what—something that I can feel but not describe—something which makes me doubt his sincerity."

"You are a sensible girl, May," said her husband, sitting down by her, and looking very much pleased, "I thought I could trust you, and I am not mistaken. But if you have a fancy for a sail and do not like to go with him, I can hire a boat any day and take you out."

"That would be hardly civil to this captain; however," observed she, "let us try his yacht first, and then if we like it we can arrange for ourselves."

Although at the first mention of such a thing, Mrs. Cameron had not been particularly desirous of trying the experiment, when she thought more of the plan of sailing, and saw the blue sea curling gently under a pleasant brisk breeze, and the vessels skimming through the water and bending before its influence, she was seized with a violent longing to experience the new sensations to which such easy and rapid motion must give rise.

They met Captain Mountsteven the next day, just as they were on the point of starting for a drive; some allusion was made to the subject, and May said she wanted to arrange some plan for the accomplishment of the project; and after a little uncertainty, hesitation and delay, it ended in the soldier, partly on Mr. Cameron's invitation, partly on his own, stepping into the britchska, and occupying the seat *vis-à-vis* to the young beauty. He made himself very agreeable during the drive, without being either conceited or impertinent. Perhaps the presence of Mr. Cameron kept him in order; perhaps he had discovered that the lady's reserve of manner and intolerance of levity had their origin in something more than ignorance and

simplicity; that they sprung from a due regard to her husband and a proper self-respect. He watched them when together, and he observed that she behaved with every appearance of ease and confidence in her husband, tinged with a becoming degree of respect such as his age deserved. Mr. Cameron himself appeared to be much attached to her in a quiet way, without any of the extravagance which makes the love of an old man for a young girl preposterous and ridiculous, so that Captain Mountsteven would have concluded him to be a very sensible man, but for the fact of his having taken the young girl as his wife with the expectation of finding happiness in the connection.

It struck the gallant captain that it would be amusing and interesting to develope in this beautiful young wife's mind more lively ideas of pleasure, and more animated expectations with regard to amusement and excitement than seemed now to occupy it. To teach her to find delight in the pursuits of dissipation, instead of in the search of the picturesque; to prefer the glare of a ball-room, or the opera-house, to the bright lights and soft shadows on a landscape; the gaze of admiring eyes, to the soft wind which lifted her

curls, flushed her cheeks, and rendered her bright eyes still brighter; this would be pleasant and new.

The unfeigned ecstacy with which she watched each new development of scenery as they drove along, the rapture with which she dwelt on the extent of sea, and sky, and coast, and the energy and warmth with which she expressed her admiration, made him fancy, that she never experienced a more exciting feeling, and was profoundly ignorant of her own personal attractions. He did not understand that this intense love of the beautiful, and the power of perceiving it, arose from a cultivated mind, he considered it rather a proof of ignorance and folly, which he supposed would make her the more ready to fall in with his plans, and to adopt his mode of thinking. For the present, however, he was content to follow her lead, and make himself agreeable by acquiescence rather than suggestion; and May was so talkative and lively, that it hardly required much conversation in any one else to fill up the blanks that occurred.

It was settled between them that they should remove that afternoon to Cowes, and if the next

day proved favourable, that they would indulge in the projected sail; this arrangement shortened their drive, for Mr. Cameron, with the usual regard for his houses which masters feel so strongly, decided that if they were to make the journey to Cowes that afternoon they had better not go far in the morning; as the shortness of the days at this time of year would make it necessary to start soon after luncheon.

So they parted with their new acquaintance, under a promise of finding him again at the Hotel at Cowes; and there the Camerons and their attendants transferred themselves before dark.

CHAPTER XI.

GONZALVO. Remember whom thou hast on board!
BOATSWAIN. None that I love more than myself,
Down with the top-mast—yare—lower—lower.

TEMPEST.

"I ALWAYS was fortunate in the weather," said Mrs. Cameron, as she received Captain Mountsteven's congratulations the next morning on the fineness of the day. "I knew it would be a lovely day because I wished it."

"I did not know the clouds or sunshine were under the influence of terrestrial beauty," replied he softly, "but if they are, no wonder they always smile on you."

"Exactly," replied she carelessly, "few people have been more favoured with sunshine both

literally and metaphorically than I, in my littl life; especially during the last three weeks,' added she with more emphasis.

They went on board, and May soon foun herself, with rapture, gliding along the dancin water, the beautiful panorama of the surrounc ing coast, varying every moment under her eye It was not in her nature to resist the powerfi influence of such a scene; the swelling hills c the island on the right, still wearing the ric hues of a lingering autumn, the amphitheatre c white houses rising from the sea, conveying th idea of peace, prosperity and home pleasures; th varying coasts of the opposite country, crowne with the dark masses of the New Forest, or pr senting their smooth, green slopes, vanishin in one long perspective in the distance; the blu sea before them enlivened by the numerou vessels on its surface, from the swift wherr and the fishing smack, to the stately man-o war at anchor; all these objects united to e chant the eyes, whilst a pleasant, soft soutl westerly wind, rustling in her shawls, an brushing mildly over her brow, seemed almo to intoxicate her with its freshness. Her spiri rose higher under all these influences, and sl

talked away gaily, and rather wildly to her companions.

"You have never been in London, Mrs. Cameron," said Captain Mountsteven.

"Indeed I have!"

"Have you—for how long?

"Oh, I was there for ages—an immense time!"

"Ay—where were you staying?"

"Where you probably have never been; not far from Queen Square."

"I have not the remotest idea where that is."

"I did not suppose you had, I never saw anything so useful as an officer all the time I was there. There were plenty of shop-keepers, butchers, shoe-makers, pastry-cooks, and linen-drapers: and I used to see no end of men, women and children, busy about one thing or another; but except the sentinel at the museum, no such important, indispensable, industrious creatures as soldiers ever met my eyes. There was now and then a policeman who frightened little children, and listened to angry cabmen—but soldiers—never. I cannot think how they all got on without them."

"Oh, you are pleased to laugh at our use

and importance—very well—I know that there is a general idea that soldiers have nothing to do, except valse, drive tandems, and knock down policemen. I shall not contradict an opinion derived, I presume from certain liberal and enlightened newspapers. I shall only ask in return what did you do in Queen Square?"

"Nothing very useful, or particularly ornamental; my name will not descend to posterity for benefits bestowed on the eastern confines of London, but my visit answered my purpose very well—it amused me.

"Did you go to the Opera?"

"No."

"What—never?"

"Never, but I shall have a box next year."

"Were you ever at any ball?"

"Neither ball, fête, déjeûner, concert, oratorio, opera nor play was I ever at, except one day at the Chiswick Gardens, and one dinner-party where the numbers were limited to four!"

"Is it possible—and yet you were amused; what a happy temper you must have!"

"I believe I have; don't you think so, Mr. Cameron?" turning to her husband.

"I have known crosser and more ill-natured women, certainly," replied he, smiling, "but we must not boast too much."

"It was a great day to me, the day I went to Chiswick fête," continued May, "I enjoyed that intensely."

Nothing could have pleased her husband much more than this avowal, since it had been a pleasure of his own procuring; but Captain Mountsteven shuddered, and affected a look of horror at the mention of such a thing.

"Is it true that you could take pleasure in such a vulgar crowd as that assembled in those gardens? Certainly, there is no accounting for tastes; but, really, those fêtes have gone off so very much. Those in the Regent's Park, indeed, are a little select, and though in itself I think a a flower-fête essentially a bore, perhaps *they* are as little a bore as could be expected from such things. But the Chiswick are dreadful."

"Why?"

"So mixed—such millions of vulgar people—nothing select or pleasant about them."

"That may be all very well for you, who probably know all the great people of London, and would not speak to anything under a

baron's son or daughter; such patrician clusiveness is of course fitting and becomi It would hurt your feelings, and perhaps inj your health to enjoy yourself on the sa ground, or in the same air as plebeian visito but for poor little me, who did not know duke from a doctor, nor a countess from confectioner, what difference did it make to r so long as they did not tread on my toes, pick my pocket?"

"Oh, but associating with such people!"

"I did not associate with them; of cour I do not mean to condemn your feelin Captain Mountsteven; no doubt, they are r sonable and just; but I trust you will ma excuses for mine, in liking to see hundreds happy faces, whether they belong to peers shop-keepers."

"Yours is an amiable taste, Mrs. Cameron

"And yours puts me in mind of the lil rality existing in one of the British West Indi Islands, where the white young ladies refus to stand *vis-à-vis* at a ball, to those who hac shade of colour in their blood, even when th father was a member of the council, and a m of education.

"Don't you get tired of standing, May?" said Mr. Cameron, presently, "I dare say we could get you a seat."

The Captain heaped up some cushions, cloaks, and flags under the shelter of the bulwark, and seated her amongst them, whilst he showered down on her shoulders the heap of shawls she had brought with her.

"And you, Sir," added he to Mr. Cameron, "will you not take a seat?" pointing as he spoke to one at a little distance on the deck, "take this cloak, I recommend, and wrap yourself well up, the breeze is freshening fast."

"Oh, no," cried May, "come and sit by me, Mr. Cameron," making room for him on the cushions by her side, "you will be much more comfortable here, than stuck out there by yourself."

He did not refuse her invitation, and her new acquaintance came to the conclusion that she had not been married long enough yet, to find her husband's society a bore, nor had she sufficient inclination for flirting, to feel it a restraint; it was, therefore, necessary for him to mind what he was about.

"What is that large white building?" sai May, presently.

"That is Osborne House; I heard th morning, that her Majesty was expected acro to-day; should you like to see her pass?"

"Oh, yes, certainly, I always like to see an thing worth seeing; can you manage to g near her, or are all subjects obliged to keep o of the way, at a respectful distance?"

"We will run down towards the mouth the harbour if you like, but are you sure yo will not mind the guns?"

"Why, they will not be loaded, will they?"

"Loaded! oh, no; but some ladies don like the noise, or the smell of the smoke; makes them nervous and hysterical."

"Oh, I dare say my nerves will bear it, pra let us go anywhere, and see as much as w can."

"My captain tells me," said the soldier, aft he had gone forward to speak to the individu who managed the vessel, "that if we go dow we shall have the wind dead against us, comin home, and shall be a long time working u against it."

"Never mind; *be* a long time, but let u

go; fast—faster—can you not put on more sails, Captain Mountsteven? I should like to go like a bird, or a steam-engine."

He smiled, and told her they had as much canvas spead as was thought safe; he had no inclination to run unnecessary risks, with so valuable a freight on board.

Just at this moment, the sound of cannon in Portsmouth harbour attracted their attention.

"Faith, there's her Majesty coming," said he, "we shall see the 'Fairy' in a moment, she always goes like the wind."

By this time, the "May-Queen" was but half a quarter of a mile from a large ship lying at anchor, and the distance was lessening rapidly.

"There comes the 'Fairy,'" cried Captain Mountsteven, pointing to a little steamer which seemed flying round the block-house at the entrance to the harbour. "Now prepare your nerves, Mrs. Cameron, we are so close we shall have the full benefit of the salute."

"It is a satisfaction that the yacht will not take fright," laughed May, "she will not run away with us, as a pair of fiery horses would."

Another minute, and flash—bang—went one great gun, echoing round the horizon, and rolling on from hill to hill, until the distant sound was lost in the thunder of the succeeding report. May clasped her hands, and held her breath with pleasure, and her delight and surprise, whilst watching the flashing cannon and the curling smoke, were so intense, that she forgot to look out for the Sovereign herself as she passed close to them.

"Look, look!" cried she in transport, as she saw the yards manned, "I never saw anything so beautiful in my life; look, up to the very highest of those—what do you call them—masts—spars—yards, is not that it? look at the little rows of men suddenly appearing; it is like magic; oh, what a perfect picture just seen through the wreaths of white smoke! ah now the breeze has swept it all away—the salute is over, we see the tall masts clear again oh, I wish it could all come over once more."

"Did you see the Queen?" inquired her husband.

"No, I never once thought of her; but it does not signify; I dare say I shall see enough of the Queen by and bye; I mean to be pre

sented at the next drawing-room, don't I, Mr. Cameron?"

"If you please, my dear May: but don't you feel it rather cold?"

The weather was apparently threatening a change: the wind, which had continued to rise ever since they had left Cowes, seemed now determined to increase into a gale; thick creamy clouds obscured the sun, already low in the horizon, and spread in long, curling, filmy streaks away to the farthest verge of the sky, as if they were tossed and torn by the force of the rushing gale; whilst a heavy haze was creeping over from the westward, blotting out the distant coasts of Hampshire and rapidly concealing the nearer shores of the Isle of Wight.

The captain of the yacht, who seemed to be a good seaman, and knew what he was talking of, gave it as his opinion that they were going to have ugly weather, and that it was a pity that the lady should be exposed to the disagreeables of wet, wind, and sea, which were coming down on them. Of course, she could take refuge in the cabin, but he hinted significantly, that to ladies and landsmen, the effect of the rough waves they might meet with, would be a pro-

bable attack of sea-sickness; and unfortunatel the cabins were not fitted for comfort at present there had been no preparations for passing eve a whole day on board, and the steward declare he had nothing in the shape of provision except the luncheon of which they had alread consumed the greater part.

To beat back to Cowes, with the wind in it present quarter, would be a long and tedious process, even if feasable; in short, he was ver anxious to take the vessel into Portsmouth har bour, and send the owner and his friends o shore as fast as possible.

In this plan, Mr. Cameron heartily coincided it might have its inconveniences certainly, bu various uneasy sensations within him, urge him powerfully to seek the land as soon as pos sible; and when his wife remonstrated at th inconvenience of passing the night at Ports mouth, whilst all their "belongings" were a Cowes, he only answered by such a helpless loo of wretchedness, and so pathetic a "Do pray! that she had not the heart to refuse.

Indeed, it did not seem as if her voice wer likely to have much weight on the occasion although her companions went through the form

of consulting her opinion; they really decided for themselves, and the little, "May-Queen" was made to turn her head towards the harbour, there to seek shelter from the wind and waves which began to buffet her so fiercely.

Captain Mountsteven had friends near Portsmouth, who, he felt assured, would be ready to assist Mrs Cameron in this dilemma; who would be delighted to receive her into their house, and extend all necessary hospitality to poor weather-beaten mariners like themselves.

May submitted with cheerful resignation; indeed, I believe this termination of her sail was agreeable rather than otherwise; she loved variety and company, and had no shyness or reserve to contend with; what should make her shy, when she had hitherto met nothing but admiration, and affection, and had the consciousness of beauty, talents, and lively spirits, inclining her to please, and be pleased with, all she met with?

"Why are you taking down all your sails, Captain Mountsteven?" exclaimed May, "they have already pulled down that pretty three-cornered thing in front, and now they are roll-

ing up this great one which I presume is the main-sail."

"I suppose my captain thinks it necessary," replied the soldier, "I leave him to manage such things, as I have quite as great a regard for my life, as he can have for his, and he knows best how to take care of both."

"But we shall not go so fast, which is stupid."

"Better than going too fast, Mrs. Cameron. I think we might make a closer acquaintance with the rolling waves, than is pleasant, if we kept up all those large sails!"

"It is mean and shabby to yield in this way; to run away from the storm, and take down all your canvas. I should be above such subterfuges. I would keep up all I could, to the very last moment!"

"Then you would have more rashness than prudence, and your enthusiasm for fast sailing would not only carry away your discretion, but probably your masts, into the bargain. You see I am wiser. But it rains so fast, and with all this wind, do let me persuade you to go below!"

"No, I should get frightened there, and sick,

too; I do not feel the wind, and I don't mind the rain; besides, in spite of your cowardly precaution of taking down your sails, we get on so fast, we shall soon be in harbour."

"Yes, fortunately the tide enables us to run over the flats, or I am sure I do not know what we should have done!"

"But these friends of yours, Captain Mountsteven, are you sure they will not think our invading them in this way an immense bore?"

"I am quite sure they will not only make me most hospitably welcome, but you too; or any friends of mine, whom I brought to them."

"It must be a comfort to have such a good opinion of one's self," said she, saucily.

"A good opinion of my friends, you should say; the merit of hospitality must be theirs; nor do I think I claim so very much for them, in supposing them ready to be kind to a young lady escaping from a strong gale."

"They might for all that think the young lady idle, or cowardly, not to face the gale and go home as she ought to do."

"I think if you reversed your situations you would hardly judge so of Lady Bridges; you

would rather receive her into your house, than compel her to run the risk of sleeping in the Solent to-night: would you not?"

"Why you do not mean to say, that we should all be really drowned, if we were to go back to Cowes: I thought it would be wet and windy, and tedious perhaps; but I had no idea it would be dangerous. How I should like to try!"

"You are a singular woman, Mrs. Cameron; are you never afraid?"

"Not when I think people want to frighten me, which is what I suspect you of doing now; my spirit rises against such impositions."

"Captain Jackson," said the owner of the yacht, beckoning her sailing-master towards him, "this young lady wants to go back to Cowes; would you undertake to run across with her, when you have landed me? I do not mean to *ask* you to do it," continued he, observing the astonished expression of the sailor's face, "I only ask whether you would willingly undertake it, if I would put the yacht at your disposal?"

"Not if I were to have the 'May-Queen' for

my trouble, on such a night as this, Sir;' was the blunt answer; eyeing Mrs. Cameron, at the same time, with intense curiosity.

"Then it would really be impossible?" said she; "I thought Captain Mountsteven was quizzing me, because I had never been on the water before: you think it would be dangerous, do you?"

"Not much thinking required ma'am," answered Jackson, softening his voice into an accent suitable to so pretty a woman. "Bless you, it's blowing great guns now; I should have thought even a lady, who had never seen the sea, could tell a wind when she felt it, tho' in course she might not know which way it blew. But if you will excuse me, I must attend to her head;" and touching his hat he withdrew forward.

They were at the mouth of the harbour, and the tide which had turned about half-an hour before, and was now running out pretty strongly, meeting the wind at this point, caused a short, unpleasant motion of the vessel, which those who have once experienced it, cannot recollect without disagreeable sensations. Mr. Cameron

was feeling dreadfully ill; Captain Mountsteven turned pale, and seemed indisposed to talk; and May herself, in spite of her courage and her spirits, felt she should not be sorry when this trial was over.

The worst evils have an end, and in process of time they found themselves in smoother water, and after some delay and difficulty, and a good deal of wetting and discomfort, the three voyagers landed at Point, and prepared to make their way to the house of Sir Thomas Bridges, at Southsea. But the furious wind and rain rendering it impossible to go on foot, they were glad to take refuge in a shop, and despatch a messenger to the George Inn for a fly to convey them thither.

The novelty of the whole proceeding diverted Mrs. Cameron excessively, and she was amusing herself in the interval with considerations as to what Lady Bridges would think of them all, when three such wretched, draggled, weather-beaten individuals presented themselves before her.

"My dear Lady Bridges," said Captain Mountsteven, on entering that lady's drawing-

room, "I have brought two of my friends to throw themselves on your hospitality. Allow me to introduce Mr. and Mrs. Cameron."

The most cordial assurances of welcome from the lady were poured out. She was delighted to see dear Mountsteven, and enchanted to receive his friends, and excessively obliged to him for acting in this friendly manner, and coming as a matter of course to their house. Then came Miss Bridges, to express a cooler pleasure, as good manners required, but a stronger curiosity; where did they come from, how came they out in such a storm; and whilst Lady Bridges listened to May's narrative, Captain Mountsteven detailed their adventures to the daughter, ending by turning again to their hostess, and demanding shelter and accommodation for the night; since not only was a return to Cowes impossible, but his friends had left all their worldly goods behind them, and wet, cold and destitute as they were, really needed the hospitable kindness which he knew Lady Bridges was going to extend to them.

Nothing could be more good-humoured than the reception which met them; and it was equally pleasant to their bodily feelings, benumbed and

wearied by exposure to the storm, to enjoy the cheerful blaze of the fire, and the stillness and comfort of an elegantly furnished drawing-room.

Lady Bridges was a little, plump, middle-aged woman, with a handsome good-humoured face, and more kindness than elegance in her manner; her daughter was very tall and handsome, with a sharp, though not unpleasant expression of countenance; she stood looking down on May as she conversed with her; all the time twisting one of her bracelets round and round, with a slightly nervous air, and every now and then glancing at the Captain as if her thoughts were more of him than anything of else. That they must be all wet, and uncomfortable, and had better change their clothes, was suggested by the elder lady; but the gentlemen denied it altogether; they had had boat-cloaks and mackintoshes, and all the necessaries of civilized life to protect them, it was only the lady who had suffered in coming on shore; perhaps she would be the better for some change of shoes, and would be more comfortable, disencumbered of her wet bonnet, the feathers of which now hung drooping on her shoulder in a deplorable way.

"Take Mrs. Cameron up-stairs, dear Barbara," suggested the mamma.

"Most delighted, ma' dear, but my things would be no use to her, I'll call Fanny;" and opening the folding doors at one end of the room, she crossed over to another apartment and returned with her sister, a very pretty girl, about May's height and age. Then came the history of their adventures all over again, which was cut short by the entrance of Sir Thomas Bridges himself, who looked a little puzzled at finding the drawing-room full of people, and as his appearance of course required that the narrative should recommence, Miss Fanny Bridges dragged her new acquaintance off at once, saying she could tell her the rest up-stairs.

"Never mind, Barbara," added she laughing, "let her stay with Valentine Mountsteven, we always play into one another's hands, and so I shall leave her in peace. If you have had sisters, you probably know that it is much the best policy not to cross one another; rivalry looks so bad, and it always shows, you know."

"I have no sisters," replied the young bride, not exactly understanding the greater part of her companion's speech.

"Oh, that's the reason then that you are so pretty," replied Miss Fanny, archly, "you had all the beauty for your own share."

May only answered by a light laugh, as she spread her hands to a comfortable fire, and then throwing off her bonnet, wrung out her long curls, which were absolutely dripping with wet.

"What a voyage you must have had!" pursued Fanny, "why it blows a perfect hurricane, are you such a great sailor as to go out for pleasure in this wild weather?"

"It was fine enough when we left Cowes this morning, I assure you!" replied May, "a bright sun, and not much wind."

"I was asleep then I suppose, I did not open my eyes, until one o'clock."

"Indeed! were you ill?"

"No, I was at a charming ball, last night, at the admiral's, and after polking until three in the morning, at his house, went through it all again afterwards in my sleep, until one."

"Oh!"

"Do you mean to give up balls now you are married," continued Miss Fanny, "some people do, but I think it great nonsense if you like dancing."

"Oh, no, I expect to take to them; I never was at a ball in my life, so I could not give them up."

"Never at a ball in your life," repeated Fanny utterly astonished, "why where were you brought up, then?"

"In Lincolnshire."

"Oh, I suppose you are a clergyman's daughter, and had to teach poor children, and nurse dirty babies."

"No, I have no father, and my uncle who brought me up, lived very retired."

"Oh, and how did you manage to grow up so beautiful and elegant, and have such a lovely gown; why it's made in the newest fashion?"

"It is part of my *trousseau*, my waiting-woman made it, about a fortnight ago."

"What, are you only just married, I did not guess that; but your bonnet is quite spoilt; those fancy straws are no wear at all."

"It does not matter in the least," said May, tossing it away, after examining it for a minute or two, "Mr. Cameron would give me twenty more if I wanted them; he would buy every pretty thing he saw, for me to wear, if I would only let him."

"What a charming man! I thought he looked immensely good natured; how I should like such a husband; I suppose he is very rich, then?"

"Yes, I believe so; at least, he has plenty of money for our wants, though perhaps it might not seem to be so much to you; such things are all comparative."

"La, my dear, riches are riches, and money is money, all the world over; I only wish I had plenty of it; but would you not like to go to a ball?"

"Yes, because I mean to give them in town, and I must go to one or two first, to know how to behave."

"What a happy woman you will be, pray ask us all to your first ball; for you know we live in London, and we go back there very soon. But now there's to be one at the rooms, the day after to-morrow, do stay here and go with us; you can send for your things from Cowes, and we could keep you a day or two, quite well. I am sure mamma would like it, and if Valentine stayed too, Barbara would of course, which is the great thing; and though I would not quite propound the rooms as the most select,

of assemblies, or recommend you to adopt the tone and manners of some of those you will see, yet it will amuse you, if you have really never seen a ball, and we know people enough to make it pleasant; unexceptionable people, of whom you need not be afraid."

"I should like to go to the assembly; but it would be taking such a liberty to propose staying here, in that off-hand way. What would Lady Bridges think of it?"

"Oh, I assure you, she would like it, if Barbara did, too; and as papa never goes to the rooms, and Mr. Cameron hardly looks like a person who would care about them, they could stay at home, and go to bed at reasonable, philosophical, well-principled hours."

"Suppose we go down stairs again," suggested May, "I am quite ready."

They returned to the drawing-room, and found Sir Thomas and Mr. Cameron engaged in some political discussion, in which the former did all the assertion, whilst the latter contented himself with an occasional assent; Lady Bridges was composedly seated at her carpet-work, whilst her eldest daughter, in the inner

the room, and stationed himself by his wife's side, with evident satisfaction. When at last they paused, and the duets appeared to be concluded, a general exclamation of thanks and praise followed.

"I am afraid I must have tired you," said May, apologetically to Miss Bridges, "but I have had no music for more than three weeks, and it is such a treat to me."

"Oh, indeed, I am most happy and obliged—I seldom have so good a performer to accompany; the treat is to me," said Miss Bridges.

"You should hear her sing," said Mr. Cameron, proud of his beautiful young wife's accomplishments, and gratified by the admiration she excited.

Of course, the whole party assailed her with entreaties for one song—one at least, if she was not weary of playing; and, as soon as she could find one amongst the heaps of music lying about, she astonished and delighted them all by her performance. Her song was just finished in time for the party to dress for dinner, for which purpose they most of them dispersed; but May having already arranged her toilet so far as was practicable, did not leave the room,

and Captain Valentine Mountsteven remained with her.

"I had no idea you were such a splendid musician, Mrs. Cameron," said he, approaching her, as she stood turning over the music on the pianoforte, "you quite astonish me."

"So do you me," was her answer, looking up quickly.

"Indeed—how so, may I ask?"

"In expressing surprise, that in three days, you are not intimately acquainted with all my accomplishments."

"Well, perhaps I have no right to be astonished—indeed I did not mean that; my surprise arose merely from meeting with any young lady who could perform in so very superior and scientific a manner; perhaps if you knew more of the usual style of young lady's performances, you would be less astonished or offended at my surprise."

"I am quite willing to admit a general ignorance with regard to most young ladies, having seen but few specimens; but, it appears to me, that Miss Bridges plays very well."

"Oh, yes, she is much above the average; but then she practises an immense deal, she is

a clever girl, however, and very fashionable; you may safely trust to her opinions, and follow her lead; Miss Fanny is wild and sometimes does things *outrées, un peu inouies.*"

"Follow Miss Bridges' lead," repeated May, with a puzzled look, "may I ask what you mean, in what respect I am to follow her—play nothing but her music, or wear green silk gowns—which do you refer to?"

"Oh, no, I don't mean either in particular—I mean in a general way—doing as she does, and adopting her tastes and modes of expression—her style, her air, in short, making her your model in fashionable life."

"Thank you for the explanation, and the advice; but, however imperfect my own manners, style, tastes, and expression may be, I hardly suppose it would improve them to add affectation, or to imitate one by nature so different from me, it would be better I should think to try and amend my own."

"You are the oddest person in the world, Mrs. Cameron," exclaimed he, "how could you suppose that I meant to imply that your manners were imperfect?"

"Simply because you proposed an alteration

in them; I dare say they are, I may be odd, but I am not so odd as to think myself perfect, but even though my manners don't please you, they seem to satisfy Mr. Cameron very well, and as he is the person most concerned, (you must admit that,) it would perhaps be a pity to make any great change without consulting his taste."

"And he of course is all the world to you?"

"I did not say that, but if I did, I suppose there would be no great harm."

What he would have answered to her hasty reply can never be known, for the entrance of others interrupted them. Dinner followed: there were several other visitors, it was in fact rather a large party, and the novelty would have pleased Mrs. Cameron had she not been seized with a violent fit of sleepiness, the effect of exercise, excitement, and the exposure to the weather; she could hardly sit at table, swallowed more yawns than food, and had seldom been sensible of a greater relief than when the signal was made to withdraw.

Pleading fatigue, she obtained permission to retire to her own room, and although anxious to discuss with her husband the plan of remaining at Portsmouth for a ball, she could not succeed

in keeping awake for the purpose, but with the sounds of the storm in her ears, mingling wildly with the murmur of waltzes and polkas ascending from the drawing-room beneath, she fell asleep and dreamed—of nothing at all.

The subject, however, was not dropped; Lady Bridges, supposing May must be as anxious for a ball as her own daughters, good-naturedly urged the plan on Mr. Cameron, and he agreed without much difficulty, provided always, business did not oblige him to return at once to London; a catastrophe which the last letters received from the office made not at all improbable.

END OF VOL. I.

LONDON:
Printed by Schulze and Co., 13, Poland Street.

MAY AND DECEMBER.

VOL. II.

MAY AND DECEMBER.

A TALE OF WEDDED LIFE.

BY MRS. HUBBACK,

AUTHOR OF

"THE WIFE'S SISTER; OR, THE FORBIDDEN MARRIAGE,"

&c. &c.

"Readers, the tale that I relate,
This lesson seems to carry,
Choose not alone a proper mate,
But proper time to marry."

COWPER.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON:

CHARLES J. SKEET, PUBLISHER,

10, KING WILLIAM STREET,

CHARING CROSS.

1854.

the enjoyment of each other's society. He felt himself dull, and was longing for their return; he had no difficulty in making business matters appear in such a light to the merchant that his presence seemed indispensable, and he hoped that the day after their return to town, he should be allowed to dine with them at their new house.

"Well, May," said Mr. Cameron, the next morning, as he was preparing to start for the City, "shall I bring your cousin back with me? There will be a seat for him in my brougham, if you would like to see him."

"No, thank you; I am too tired to want him—that is, I'm not tired at all, but you must know that I mean to do something else, and see somebody quite different."

"Indeed! who, may I ask, or is it a secret?"

"Oh, dear, no—not from you; indeed, I was going to ask your permission first, as I would not do it if you did not approve. I want to go out nearly to Stratford-le-Bow to see Grace Dunsford, and bring her back here with me, to spend the day; and you can bring her

husband home, if you please, in your brougham, to take her back in the evening."

"My dearest girl, have you the least idea how far it is to Stratford?"

"Very little, or rather none at all; but I suppose not much above a hundred miles."

"No, but it is nearly ten, I assure you."

"Possibly; but as I promised Grace to see her to-day, I really must drive down there; and after all, it is not so far as Stratford, actually, that I want to go; it is several miles this side of it."

"But it is a long way."

"Well, now I will tell you what we will do," said the wife with a most persuasive smile; "I will go down with you this morning, and for love of me, you will let me have your carriage on to Alfred Place; I know it is not much more than three miles from the counting-house, and that is nothing for your horse; come, I will put on my bonnet, and be ready in a moment."

She had her own way of course; Mr. Cameron was very glad of her company into the city, and after sundry injunctions to be sure

and not let James Wildey come back with him, she set him down at the old house where she had formerly visited, and drove on herself to Alfred Place.

Grace met her on the stairs with a smiling face, and a cordial welcome; but May would hardly allow time for an inquiry after her health, she was in such a hurry to get her friend into her carriage and convey her to Hyde Park Gardens. She would admit of no delays, and hear of no difficulties; Harry was certainly to come for her in the evening, and they could go home together, and May had twenty thousand things to say to her friend, which were all in such a hurry to come out, that she did not in the least know which to say first, and she should say none of them until they were fairly in the carriage.

It would not be easy to repeat one quarter of the prattle which May poured out to her friend as they drove along; nor to give any notion of the confusion of ideas in Grace's mind resulting from the jumble of people, places, and circumstances of all which she had never heard before, and the narrative concerning which was con-

stantly interrupted by ejaculations relative to the shops, the carriages, or the crowds, they were passing, or totally drowned in the rattle of the wheels.

When at length they were established in May's own drawing-room, and she had thrown herself down on the sofa to rest, her conversation was but little more consecutive, she was in such a wild flurry of spirits.

She repeated again and again the particulars of their voyage from Cowes, and the evening spent at Southsea, and dwelt much on the personal attractions of Captain Mountsteven; suddenly digressing from both to give Grace a comic description of Miss Wildey's wedding difficulties, and her own convictions with regard to the manner of life of Mr. and Mrs. Arnold.

Grace listened and replied, and sometimes laughed, and sometimes sighed, and at length it struck her volatile companion that she was much less lively than she used to be, and that something must be the matter.

Starting up from her couch, she suddenly ran up to Mrs. Dunsford, and laying her hands

on her shoulders, she held her at arms length, and looked long and steadfastly in her face.

"Well," said Grace at last smilingly, "what new discoveries are you bent on making, what do you see to require such minute examination?"

"Something is the matter," observed May, "you are altered, what is wrong?"

Grace coloured a little, and tried to shake off May's hands, but in vain.

"Tell me, I must know what vexes you," demanded Mrs. Cameron, "are you sick or sorry?"

"I am very well, why should you suspect that that there is anything wrong?"

"Is Harry cross to you?"

"No—oh no, May."

"Are you too poor, I always said you would be!"

"No, indeed!"

"But none of your family are ill, are they?"

"No, they are all pretty well."

"Then what makes you grave, thoughtful, and uneasy, as I see you are?"

"Growing older, and having the cares of life on my shoulders, I suppose."

"Nonsense, you deny all cares, and you are not more than six months older than when we parted. Come tell me something reasonable."

"Indeed, I can give no reason; so do not worry yourself about it, May."

"Very well, but you will see that I shall find out for all that."

Then she turned the conversation to some other topic, and again wandered off into the regions of fancy and memory, though she continued to scrutinize her companion more carefully than she had done before, with the view to find out what saddened her brow.

Mr. Cameron came home about four o'clock, and his wife on seeing his carriage at the door, for she had peeped out at the sound of the bell, confidently expected that Harry Dunsford would accompany him. But she was mistaken, he came in alone, spoke to Grace gravely but kindly, looked tired and worried, and sat down to rest beside his wife.

"Where is Mr. Dunsford," exclaimed May, impatiently, "is he not coming?"

"No, he cannot be spared, Wildey says there is a great deal of correspondence in his office which must be got over, and he will most likely have to work late."

"Then he will not come for me," suggested Grace, timidly, "I had better go home."

She looked constrained and uncomfortable in Mr. Cameron's presence, and May's quick imagination suggested that whatever was wrong was in some way connected with the counting-house. She felt there was an awkwardness in retaining Grace, but she hardly knew why Mr. Cameron indeed looked as if he would prefer being alone, and Mrs. Dunford evidently wished herself away, so she thought it best to interpose no further objections, but to allow her friend to depart. The carriage was ordered, and the visitor took leave.

As soon as she was gone, May exclaimed:

"What is the matter, Mr. Cameron? you look worried and vexed, what has annoyed you?"

"Business," replied he, "matters have got wrong, the foreign correspondence is all behind hand, letters that ought to have been attended to, have been unanswered, and Wildey tells me,

it is all the fault of Dunsford; Ashton is growing old and unsettled, and Dunsford has been unsteady and careless ever since his marriage. So Wildey says—it vexes me—I have a great regard for Ashton, and Dunsford, as his son-in-law had a claim on me; but if he is not to be trusted, why I cannot advance him to his place, and this thought annoys me."

"I do not believe Harry Dunsford is unsteady," cried May, warmly. "He is a very excellent, well-principled young man, and I am quite sure there is some mistake."

"My dear May, do not pretend to talk of what you do not of course understand. It was imprudent of him to marry so young, and if he is too much taken up with his wife, it does not suit our house to sacrifice its interests to the amiable affections of any young man. It may be natural for him, but is not expedient for us."

"I am certain that his partiality for Grace, is of a nature to make him work hard, and toil cheerfully for her sake. Besides, you ought to make allowances for him," persisted the young wife; she well remembered Wildey's aversion to

Ashton and his family, and knowing how unscrupulous her cousin was in some respects, she half suspected that the complaints alluded to, had more foundation in malice on Wildey's part, than misconduct on Harry's.

"My dear, we cannot afford to make allowances for careless conduct, when it involves the commercial interests of hundreds, besides ourselves. I do not expect you to understand about business-matters, or to appreciate rightly the importance of these charges; but in consequence of your ignorance, you must be satisfied to trust to my judgment, and not interfere in what you do not understand."

"I quite understand my affection for Grace, and my regard for her husband, and I cannot hear him aspersed with unconcern or indifference."

"Well, well, I will allow for a young woman's prejudice, and you shall say what you like, but I shall retain the privilege of acting as I please," replied her husband, smiling good-humouredly.

"And of what use will my talking be, if you make no difference in your conduct for it; I do not want to be treated only like a child, allowed

to chatter, and not be listened to!" and May pouted as she pronounced these words in a most discontented tone.

"I presume you do not really expect to influence my decisions, or to shield misconduct even in a friend, or a friend's husband," observed Mr. Cameron coolly, and taking up a newspaper, he began to read.

May walked away to her dressing-room, and did not return until dinner-time. She spent the interval, partly in meditating on what had just passed, partly in reading, and partly in the duties of her toilette.

The evening passed calmly, and somewhat dully; she was in low spirits, more from the reaction consequent on her excessive liveliness in the morning than from vexation about what had just occurred: he was apparently engrossed in some calculations which he was noting down on the back of a letter, and from some words which now and then escaped him, she concluded it had something to do with Russia and hemp. She was not likely to find such a process amusing, nor to derive much pleasure from watching his annotations. The lively evening at Southsea

arose vividly in her mind, as a strong contrast to the gloom of the present; and she was forced to amuse herself in the absence of other occupations with indulging her fancy in drawing pictures for the future. This was her usual resource when disconcerted or vexed by the actual state of things. She always escaped at once into the regions of imagination, and consoled herself with thinking what things should be, when she could control every thing.

The dreary evening passed at length, and May found her spirits considerably revived, and her satisfaction in the present order of things much strengthened by the brightness of the succeeding day. Mr. Cameron was still grave and thoughtful, however, and as he seemed little anxious to talk, she did not disturb him. When before parting he asked if she was now disposed to see her cousin, she did not answer as she had done yesterday. She was inclined to think that any society would be pleasant which relieved the monotony of her yesterday evening's experience. So she readily acquiesced in the proposal. Mr. Cameron remarked that he was glad of it, he thought Wildey had been

both hurt and disappointed at being excluded yesterday, and he should not have liked to repeat the vexation.

May's cheek flushed, and her heart swelled at the idea. What right had he to be angry or hurt, was the thought; did he suppose the past was, or could be, all forgotten instantly; or did he expect to dictate as to when he was to be received. He must learn that there at least, in her own drawing-room, in her own house, she would be mistress. Such were her thoughts, as her husband left the room, and she sat down to indulge her angry feelings.

Then she began to wonder what she should do alone all the long day, and how she should amuse herself. She felt less inclined to occupation than formerly, and more disposed to wish for a companion than she had ever been. The unsettled feelings which prevented her engaging in any regular occupation, and which made her discontented and uneasy, were the natural result of the recent excitement, and her unfixed mode of life, since her marriage. With some new plan every day in their heads, and Mr. Cameron always devoted to her, she had never felt uneasy or

dull, but now it was otherwise. She had no fancy for anything within her reach, she had not patience to play, nor resolution to read; but she lay back in an easy chair, allowing her mind to skim through a hundred vague fancies, and half-formed theories; considering what she would do, in some impossible, or extremely improbable case, or allowing her imagination to picture future scenes, in which Captain Mountsteven acted conspicuous parts.

She roused herself, however, in the afternoon, to go to a publisher and order some of the books which were to be presented to her uncle. The thoughts of him, and her old home, had a softening tendency, putting her in a better humour with things around her, and making her feel more amiable even towards her cousin James, so she resolved to receive him with kindness and cordiality. She had not been very long returned from her drive, when in company with Mr. Cameron, he arrived. May was in her dressing-room at the moment, when her husband entering rather hastily, told her he had left Wildey in her *boudoir*, and begged her to go down to him!

May had to summon no little courage to meet her cousin; a hundred unpleasant thoughts crowded on her mind as she walked downstairs. Their last interview, so stormy and unkind, her previous engagements to him; his disappointment of yesterday; and her suspicions of unfair treatment with regard to Harry Dunsford, all troubled her at the same moment, and made her uncertain how to act, and what to say. Slowly she opened the door and entered the room with a more stately step than was at all her ordinary manner: he was standing when she approached, he turned towards her; he too, for a moment, looked troubled; his eye fell beneath hers, which she fixed on him with a calm and severe expression.

"I am glad to see you, James," was her short cool salutation.

"Thank you; I am indeed glad—delighted to see you, cousin May—to see you here; to be able to congratulate you on finding you mistress of this house. Believe me, it affords me the most heart-felt joy to do so."

"I am exceedingly obliged to you," was

her answer, and a slight tinge of irony seeme to mark her accent, and gave a strange e pression to her face. He wanted to say som thing else, but whilst he hesitated, Mr. Camer returned to them, and they all sat down t gether round the fire. Little was said by eith of the three, a sort of constraint dwelt on t their minds, and May felt very glad when soc afterwards she discovered that it was time to g and prepare for dinner.

Wildey was uncomfortable enough, duri the greater part of dinner, May's manners co tinued unpleasantly stiff and cold, and he w puzzled how to behave in his turn; but it wou never suit him to allow such a degree of distan and reserve to intrude between them, he wish and expected to have great influence with Ma but if he did not secure it at first, if he did n compel her to become his friend and ally, s might perchance prove a dangerous enem The first step to secure her confidence he b lieved would be, to persuade her that his o feelings of love were extinct. She must shri from him, if she still considered him as a r jected lover, especially after the violence and u kindness of his conduct in Lincolnshire.

Fortunately for him, either Mr. Cameron was busy or he was tired; perhaps he had papers to look over, but Wildey more than suspected that he was only intent on a peaceful nap on the sofa, when he withdrew, soon after dinner was concluded to his own study. Taking advantage of this circumstance, the clerk immediately hastened in search of his cousin, determined to bring about some sort of explanation between them. He found May busy with some very engrossing knitting, which seemed to occupy her whole attention at the moment. Without waiting for an invitation, which he strongly suspected he should not receive, he drew a chair beside her and sat down. "May," said he, looking earnestly at her, "when we parted in London in August, how much sorrow, anxiety, and disappointment you would have saved me, had you informed me of your engagement! It was not kind, generous, considerate of you to treat me so; after all I had done, and endeavoured to do for your benefit, after planning and toiling for you, to trifle with my real interest in your happiness, and conceal from me a circumstance which so nearly concerned me!"

"I hope I am as capable as most people of grateful feeling, and am not insensible to kindness in any one; but I am not really aware in what respect I am indebted to you, nor what particular claim you had at that time, that I should make known what Mr. Cameron especially wished should be concealed."

"And have you quite forgotten all the past, May?" said he reproachfully.

"No, indeed; if I had, I should perhaps be less surprised that now, under present circumstances—*you* should wish to recall it." She looked steadily at him as she spoke.

"It is not *all* the past, that I wish to remember," replied Wildey. "There is one part that I would blot out from your memory; one to which I never desire to recur. Well, let the whole of our past be forgotten however; may we not in that case still be friends; we still are cousins you know, and with the tie of blood to bind us, surely, surely, May, we ought not to be enemies!"

"Certainly not."

"Then I may look upon you May, as a friend, we are such friends as we were the day we first

spoke of your marriage by anticipation; have you forgotten our conversation of that day; have you ever thought of your promise to me; and all that we then planned?"

"I remember it all," was May's reply, given in a cold constrained voice, which did not afford much encouragement to Wildey. He hesitated what to say next; and May suddenly began abruptly.

"What is all this that you have been telling Mr. Cameron about Harry Dunsford; why do you slander a man so much better than yourself?"

"Slander," repeated he; "what do you mean, who says I slander him?"

"I do; I say that you accuse him unjustly —I am certain that you do; you tell Mr. Cameron that he is unsteady and idle; it is no such thing; and you interfered to prevent his coming here yesterday, when I wanted him."

"It did not suit me that he should come," replied Wildey, coldly.

"You did it to thwart me, James."

"No, indeed; I have no wish to thwart you,

but remember you have nothing to do with the counting-house or the clerks. I will have no interference in my department."

"Nothing to do—you will have no interference—what sort of language is this from you to me, Mr. James Wildey?"

"The language of one to whom you must attend, May Cameron. Our time for joking and nonsense is over now; the time for business is at hand. Your fortune is made, but mine remember is still to make, and you have promised to aid me in building it up."

May looked at him in amazement, he looked stern and resolute; very different from what she had ever known him.

"What has all this to do with Mr. Dunsford visiting me last night, how should that interfere with your plans, or mar your fortune?"

"I don't choose he should visit here, and you are not to have his wife here either."

"You don't choose—what next, I wonder!"

"Yes, May: let us understand each other at once; in agreeing to marry Mr. Cameron, you put yourself in my power; you gave me the

control of yourself and your house; you promised on your word and honour to assist me in any way, I would point out."

An impatient "well" was her answer.

"Now it is necessary for my plans, that both Ashton and Dunsford should leave the counting-house; they interfere with me, and are on many accounts an annoyance; you must therefore, withdraw your countenance from the wife of a man with whom I cannot be supposed to be on good terms."

"I do not see why I should not continue to agree with the wife, even if you do choose to quarrel with the husband," exclaimed May with great warmth.

"Besides," continued the clerk, "there is a very great difference now in your relative situations. Intimacy between you is out of the question, and ought not to exist. You are the wife of a wealthy man, she of a poor dependent clerk; it is preposterous to expect where there is no equality, that there can be intimacy. No, no, May; seek your intimates amongst the gay, the fashionable, the great; those whose acquaintance may be an honour and a credit, and not with one who dropped by you, will at once

sink into the insignificance which is her portion."

"What nonsense you do talk—you run on with a long string of words without meaning, and arguments as empty as your words, and expect by this process to convince me. You have not as yet given me a single reason for acting in the way you propose, except your sovereign will and pleasure."

"Well, May, that must be reason enough. *Je le veux, parceque je le veux.* Let that suffice you for the present," replied her cousin, in a tone intended to soothe her.

"It does not suffice me at all. Because you desire it, is that a reason that I should be ungrateful, unkind, forgetful of one who has been a good friend to me? No, I tell you, James Wildey, I will not renounce Grace Dunsford just because you say I must. I will help you where I can, but my friends and intimates are not to be chosen simply at your bidding. I will not be dictated to, I say!"

"It's of no use getting angry, May," answered he, looking at her flushed cheek, and proud indignant glance; "you must submit to my better judgment. I don't want to vex you, indeed I

don't," added he, "depend upon it, I know best, in this instance. It is the greatest mistake in the world to fetter yourself on first starting in life with low and inferior associates; you will soon find others who will please you a great deal more, and in every respect suit you better."

"I have not patience with all this pretence," cried May, with a scornful air, "all this parade of caring about me, whilst I know well enough the whole time that it is only your own interest which you seek; you do not deceive me, I assure you."

"I never attempted to deceive you; I told you from the first that it was necessary that I should get rid of those two men; in trying to persuade you of the advantage to yourself which must result from carrying out my views, I am entirely disinterested, and am only seeking to make you better satisfied. I know you must do it. You dare not refuse me; you have pledged your word and honour to that effect, but, unkind as you think me, I am really anxious for your pleasure and happiness. You must drop the intimacy with Mrs. Dunsford,

and you will hereafter thank me for telling you to do so."

With an impatient exclamation, May sprang up, and hastily crossing the room, seated herself on the other side of the fire-place, and taking a hand-screen held it in such a position as to conceal her face from her cousin. She could not deny his right to her services, but she recoiled from the submission which he exacted.

She was strongly tempted to revolt, to cast off his authority, and defy him, but a vague dread prevented her at once declaring her independence; she did not know what he might do; bold, clever, and unscrupulous, as she believed him to be, might he not with as little hesitation overthrow and trample down herself, as he proposed to do with others who stood in his way?

At this moment, the entrance of Mr. Camero[illegible] put an end to further altercation, and during a conversation between the gentlemen, May had time to recover her spirits and resume her usual tone. Wildey, after an interval, turned again to her, and began proposing various plans to amuse her, suggesting everything which he

could think of, to soothe her irritation, and shew his regard for her feelings. And she tried to answer as if nothing had happened, as she did not wish her husband to perceive their disagreement: since for many reasons she would have been most unwilling to explain its cause, though had she but known the advantage she thus afforded her cousin, she would have probably been eager to explain it all.

Whilst Mrs. Cameron was disputing with her cousin about the Dunsfords, and her friendship for them, these very individuals were engaged in a discussion in some degree connected with the same topic. Grace and Harry were spending the evening in Queen Square; the young Ashtons were all gone out to a Christmas party, and it was to enliven her father, who remained at home, that the Dunsfords quitted their own fireside.

The lapse of years, and great mental exertion were beginning to tell visibly on Mr. Ashton's person; he looked much older than he had done, a twelvemonth before; his health had failed in some degree, and his mind seemed also

affected; he was more irritable, and fidgetty nervously excitable about his occupations, and inclined to gloomy views of the future. At the present time, the manners and language of Wildey incensed him greatly; he certainly had reason for thinking himself harshly and unkindly used, and both he and Dunsford were convinced that the head clerk was employing underhand measures, and using some unfair advantages to prejudice Mr. Cameron against them. Of what they were accused or suspected, they could not tell, but all Harry's influence with his father-in-law could scarcely keep him from openly demanding an explanation though he knew not of what; or attempting a justification before he was accused.

"I know what it is," Ashton would often repeat; "he thinks because he has married his cousin to Mr. Cameron, that he is going to be head of the house; he expects to make his fortune I have no doubt, and that by means which are not quite fair. I am certain that all is not right in his books, and so Mr. Cameron will find when he comes to examine. This

absence from town, and marrying, and all that, have given that Wildey an opportunity by which he has profited."

Again and again Grace tried to turn her father's thoughts from this subject; he continued to return to it, after every digression. She talked of Jane's improvement in housekeeping, of Robert's good character with his employers, or Sarah's happiness in her new frock, in vain. Then she detailed the kind visit which Mrs. Cameron had paid her, and all the particulars which she had learned from May, of their wedding tour, and the adventures there befalling them. Nothing, however, would cheer her father, or incline him to take a hopeful view of the future; it was no use at all, the young lady being so friendly and kind; it would not last; Grace must not expect it; she would be influenced by her cousin of course, and would soon imbibe his dislike to them; or if she did not, she would have gay people, and fashionable amusements, and wealth, splendour, and occupations of every kind to put them all out of her head. A sudden elevation, such as hers, would make her brain dizzy, and she would probably

Mrs. Cameron and Mrs. Dunsford, the
must at once make up her mind to that.
Grace could not very easily make up her
to losing a friend, and one who only yest
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she wanted Harry to support her view,
Harry unfortunately was far more inclin
her father's.

He was as perfectly aware of Wildey's i
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him fetching home his wife yesterday, and
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coldly at him, as to convince Harry som
had been said to his disadvantage. But h
a strong feeling of integrity to support

principles. He looked forward with calmness to the possible termination which the head clerk's enmity seemed to threaten; he supposed, if the object of the latter was to drive him from the counting-house, he should eventually be obliged to go; but he resolved that he would do nothing himself, which could tend to bring about such a conclusion. He was determined to bear and forbear to the utmost; and if at last obliged to go, he would take an unstained character with him.

It was, of course, very disagreeable to be on bad terms with the head of the counting-house, or to be subject to one who evidently disliked him; but Harry knew that go where he would, he should certainly meet with some disagreeables, and that the way to pass through life with comfort and satisfaction, is not so much to seek to suit our situation to our taste, as to suit our tastes and habits to our situation.

As to Grace herself, she knew her husband's fears, and in some measure participated in his calm resolutions; there were times, it is true, during the long hours which she spent alone, when her spirits failed her, and in fancy she

dwelt on the idea of her husband and her father alike losing their present situations, and perhaps experiencing considerable difficulty in procuring others; at these moments, a vague dread of the future seized her mind, and she was oppressed with fears, which she could scarcely define; but these forebodings were always dispersed by the sight of Harry, and a conversation with him, full as he was of trust, and hope, and cheerful confidence, never failed to restore her equanimity also.

She often told her husband that though it would grieve her much to lose May Cameron as a friend, she should be far more sorry if she lost the power of thinking well of her. She could quite understand and admit that the change in May's situation might render inexpedient or impossible any great degree of intimacy, it was natural that she should find other engagements, and other claims on her time; but Grace could not bear that she should drop their acquaintance from partial misrepresentations, or prejudices instilled by others, that she should cease to wish them well, or to esteem them, or that she should entertain doubts as to Harry's character

or the rectitude of his conduct. To do this, she thought would shew a weakness of mind and an error in judgment which would materially lessen Mrs. Cameron in the eyes of the partial wife; no one who had known Harry Dunsford and James Wildey, as May must have known them both, ought to have a moment's hesititation as to which to believe, which to esteem, which to prefer. Mrs. Dunsford's feelings were most correctly conjugal, and she may perhaps be pardoned for estimating her husband's worth so highly, and holding those cheaply who could doubt his integrity.

CHAPTER II.

TITANIA. If you will patiently dance in our round
And see our moonlight revels, go with us!
If not, shun me and I will spare your haunts.

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM.

WE must pass over a few months, during which no event of any particular importance occurred, and take up the story again about the beginning of the spring. It was two o'clock of a bright sunny afternoon, when Mr. Cameron was sitting alone in his splendid drawing-room, sometimes reading the papers, sometimes nervously pacing up and down the room. He looked fagged, worn and unhappy, and seemed in a state of great mental disquiet, as if he hardly could help expressing his feelings aloud. Again

and again he pulled out his watch, and a murmured ejaculation of some nature unknown passed his lips, but he did not leave the room, although he once or twice walked to the door, as if about to go out.

At length, another door opened, and his wife entered—she was looking very beautiful, though rather paler than when he had seen her in the country, and the fashionable elegance of her dress was well calculated to set off her figure and air to advantage.

"How late you are May," said her husband reproachfully, looking again at his watch, as he spoke, "if I had known you would be so long, I would have gone down into the city; I wanted very much to go, but you had said you should go out early."

"Early—well—good heavens, what did you think I meant by early, Mr. Cameron—seven or eight o'clock in the morning!"

"It is past two now, May!" replied he, very gravely.

"Well, I think that is monstrous early for me, when you remember that I have not been to bed before four o'clock for these three nights.

I am sure I made a most virtuous exertion to get up at this hour." She turned away carelessly as she spoke, and began looking over her notes and invitations.

"I wish I had known when you would come," persisted he, following her, "for I really would have taken the morning for going to the counting-house."

"Oh, that horrid counting-house," was her only answer.

"Why horrid, May?" replied he, "I am sure I don't often allow it to interfere with your pleasure, or to take me away from you."

"Oh dear, no," laughing lightly as she spoke, "do not fancy I mean that; I assure you it is not that reason which makes me call it horrid!" Then seeing he looked mortified at the careless tone in which she spoke, and thinking perhaps she had not been kind, she added—"No, I must say, you are really good enough about that Mr. Cameron, you are always ready to oblige me, in giving up your time to my wishes."

His countenance brightened a little, he put his arm round her waist, and looking at her affectionately, he said,

"You know, my dear girl, I really wish to make you happy."

She looked down, hesitated a moment, and then with flashing eyes raised to him, she exclaimed: "Then Mr. Cameron give it up altogether; you have fortune enough without that horrid business, and I should be so glad—so very glad if you had nothing more to do with it."

"Nonsense, May, to build up the business has been the pride and glory of my life, I cannot give it up; but yet," and his voice and aspect changed as he spoke, "I fear it is not so flourishing as when I spent my days there, something is wrong, the business is declining, the profits are less, the accounts are unsatisfactory, I do not know what it is."

"Turn it all over to James Wildey then," said May, "he understands all about it, and I am sure he would like it, make him partner, and retire from the active management, and give up your time to me!"

"Did he tell you to propose that, May?" demanded her husband, looking earnestly at her, "I have sometimes, often indeed, thought that was what he really wanted."

see, and which May pretended not to observe, and tried not to mind. It was against her conscience to allow ridicule of her husband, neither could she endure that any one else should observe his old-fashioned peculiarities of taste.

"Are you going to the Duchess of —— party to-morrow?" inquired the soldier presently, "all the world will be there, they say!"

"Oh yes, of course," replied May.

"What, out again to-morrow," said her husband reproachfully, "what a life you lead!"

"Oh, yes, and to night, too; we are engaged to night to a dinner, and a ball or two; I almost forget where," answered May.

"I cannot stand it," murmured Mr. Cameron, "it would kill any one. I detest this dissipation. Never one evening's quiet!" he gave a deep sigh as he spoke; it was very different indeed from the domestic life, the calm fire-side-enjoyments which he had imagined he should secure in marrying again.

"I delight in it all; I could not live without it; I would not give up society for anything," was her reply; but it too was followed by a sigh.

"Surely, Sir, you would not be so unreasonable as to expect Mrs. Cameron to quit the society in which she shines so much. She, the reigning beauty of the season; she, whose loveliness has been noticed in the highest quarter, as newspapers say; she so *recherchée*—so—so; in short, you would not wish her to shut herself up at home? 'It is for homely features to keep home—they have their name-thence—' so says the poet, and I am sure he is right, in this instance at least!" The Captain spoke with a warmth and enthusiasm which was likely to be more pleasing to the lady than the gentleman.

"If I had married Mrs. Cameron for the accommodation of the fashionable world, it would be all very well to allow her to devote herself to it; but such was not precisely my object when I made her my wife," answered the husband, in a tone that shewed annoyance. This was not what the young man wished, he had too much taste to like domestic disagreements, so to cover the awkwardness of the moment, he said to her,

"I hope, however, that you *will* go to the duchess' ball; because I know there is a friend

of mine dying to meet you there; one whom you may perhaps have forgotten, but who has not forgotten you."

"Indeed," replied May, with natural curiosity, "who may that be?"

"Oh, I am not going to tell; but he came all the way from Paris to see you, we talked a great deal about you, when we met there."

Such an announcement could not fail to arouse a most lively anxiety to learn who this individual was, but Captain Mountsteven baffled her questions, and refused to give her any more information. Mr. Cameron, meanwhile, looked every moment more annoyed at his wife's way of talking, and to escape a remonstrance which she fancied impending, more than from any desire for his society, she asked Mountsteven to accompany them in her carriage to the artist's.

He did not require much pressing to induce him to comply, and with a little more delay they started on this expedition.

Mrs. Cameron had plunged deeply into dissipation, she liked it for its own sake, and she liked it, that she might escape from thought. Admired, flattered, and caressed, for her beauty

and wealth, she had secured a large and fashionable acquaintance, and naturally gay, and not unnaturally vain, she enjoyed the distinction with which she was treated. But she had other reasons for seeking the distractions of society, than the simple love of amusement; the great object of her life at present, was to avoid her cousin, James Wildey, just as his ruling wish seemed to be to follow her everywhere. He was a shadow darkening her days, a source of terror and annoyance, unspeakable. He had succeeded in establishing a sort of fear of him, which in some respect resembled the fascinations of a serpent over its victim, but which had not all the effect which he intended. She had given up point after point to his requisitions; she might fret, repine, exclaim, refuse, reproach, but it always ended in her giving way at last; excepting that she would still seek relief in society which he could not enter, amongst people where his name was happily unknown.

Her own drawing-room, or boudoir, her carriage, and her opera-box were never safe from his presence, he haunted her, until she was sick of the park, and weary of the Queen's

Theatre. He was always present at all her own dinner-parties, and invariably presented himself at every soirée.

That she had still the power of secluding herself from him, in the security of some fashionable saloon, was to him a bitter annoyance; he had succeeded in a great measure at first, in dictating as to her pleasures, and arranging her society; but as her acquaintance gradually extended to people beyond his reach, he found that on many more occasions than he liked, she effectually escaped from him. On this point, he sometimes attempted a remonstrance, but it was ineffectual; he could not openly object to her forming fashionable acquaintance, nor did he like to say that he wished her to go no where that he could not accompany her; such an assertion was too openly and obviously selfish, too true in fact, for him to dare to make it. But he tried by insinuations, by representations of what was due to her husband, and by urgent entreaties to take care of her health, whenever he heard of invitations from those he did not know, or who would not know him, to prevent her accepting them. But he tried in vain; she never would understand

him on such occasions, or she would not listen, or she would not agree. Anything for himself within her power she would do; her promise bound her, and she would not retract it; but her own engagements could be, ought to be nothing to him; and these she must and would settle as she pleased.

For his sake, she had shunned her early friends; for his sake, she had held her tongue, when both Ashton and Dunsford were abruptly dismissed from her husband's employment; for his sake, she had already proposed him as a partner in the concern, and was ready to urge the project at every suitable opportunity. Was not this enough; she had sacrificed her scruples of conscience at his persuasion; she had incurred self-reproach for ingratitude and unkindness; was she to be a quite slave; was she to have no will, no pleasure, no occupation, no amusement apart from him? No, this was a tyranny to which she could not submit; her new friends and her present engagements should not be interfered with; there were limits to her patience and forbearance; and pressed beyond these, she would rebel; she would reveal all she

knew, or all she suspected to her husband, and who would then be dismissed from the counting-house, perhaps, her good cousin James could guess.

The excited voice, the rising colour, the heaving breast with which all this was said, told Wildey, as plainly as her words, that he must go no farther; he dared not brave her indignation, he feared her; and he had no small difficulty in concealing this fear. He answered softly, and humbly; how could she misunderstand him so; why should she suppose he had a wish to tyrannize over her; oh, no, he only spoke for her good; and of this he was quite ready to allow, that she must really be the best judge; he had no wish to dictate—and then as to the counting-house affairs, why should she distress herself so unnecessarily; why should she imagine that there was anything wrong in what had been done? The changes which he had effected had been entirely for the good of the house, and the only reason why she was not aware of this, was, that she could not, of course, understand the business, of which he must be a better judge than herself. Mr. Cameron him-

self, was satisfied; why then should she mistrust him? He would interfere no more; let her go where she pleased, mix in what society she chose, he would keep his advice, in future, to himself; but if she should hereafter discover that her intrusion into circles so much above her own station, gave rise to invidious remarks, and brought satire and ridicule as much upon herself, her country manners, and early ignorance of the tone of good society, as it must of course do on the age, counting-house habits, and *bourgeois* tastes of Mr. Cameron, then she might remember his warnings, and think from what he would have saved her.

To this insinuation, May had replied with a glance of immeasurable scorn and disbelief; she was not afraid of being laughed at. She felt herself the equal in cultivation, accomplishments, and elegance of taste to those with whom she had associated; and in beauty, as in wealth, she was aware she had few superiors. Rank of course she could not claim, but this did not distress her; with so many other distinctions, she could afford to do without nobility; and with the ready tact of a quick-witted woman,

she had almost immediately accommodated herself to the polished elegance, the indolent refinement, the *laisser aller* tone of the circle in which she now formed a part. In consequence of this conversation, which had occurred a few days previously to the period when my narrative recommences, the cousins had parted coldly; on one side, alarm, irritation, and anxiety, and on the other, annoyance and scorn. She had not seen him since, and this was a great relief to her; although the prevailing fear of meeting him, still made her uncomfortable when she went into public. Nor was he more easy in his mind; his cousin's admission of Captain Mountsteven's attentions had latterly been an additional annoyance to him, and added to his other anxieties the growing pain of jealousy. The young soldier was ever at her side, when they met, and no doubt in those circles where Wildey could not follow her, a similar friendship was carried on. The fact, that her husband was always with her, and that he was on good terms with her young admirer, saved May from much remark and scandal; but could not at all calm her cousin's mind, or do away with his

fears. He had long accustomed himself to consider May as his future wife, and not unfrequently employed his leisure moments, in calculating how soon she was likely to be free, and open to his advances.

The pursuit, therefore, of Mountsteven, although carried on with much decorum, reserve and present appearance of propriety, alarmed him on many accounts. He fancied that the soldier's influence counteracted his own, he feared him as a future rival, unless, indeed, what he equally feared,—Mountsteven entertained views still more dishonourable and dangerous to the object of his admiration. Wildey had wished exceedingly to give May some advice on this point, and, but for her anger at his general interference, he would have ventured to hint at it; but she had alarmed him too much; and so excited were his feelings at parting, after the scene to which I have alluded, that he felt unequal to meeting her again for several days, lest he should betray his uneasiness, or increase her anger in any way. Absence made him miserable; but meeting seemed worse, and for a brief interval, he resolutely abstained from it.

In the meantime, the attentions of Mountsteven, which alarmed James Wildey, were not by any means a matter of indifference to Mr. Cameron; he saw them with a degree of concern which made him uncomfortable, but he concealed his feelings with a Spartan heroism which did far more credit to the kindness of his heart, than the clearness of his judgment. He loved May tenderly, but he did not do her justice in some respects, and thus became unhappy; had he gone to her, and told her kindly and candidly his opinion, and his fears, had he exercised towards her the openness and unreserve which are the due of a wife, no less than of a husband; had he appealed to her understanding and her honour, she would undoubtedly have yielded at once; she would have put an end to an acquaintance which was too remarkable and doubtful in its appearance to be prudent, although there might be nothing improper in it.

Unfortunately, his confidence in his own judgment failed him at this juncture, he could not bear to seem to mistrust her; he dreaded of all things the appearance of jealousy, and he shrank from the ridicule which he feared would

attach to the conjugal misgivings of a man of his age and station.

A hundred times, a remonstrance, a caution, a hint, had risen to his lips, and happy would it have been, had he uttered it at once; he did not; and his wife, in the innocence of her heart, continued an acquaintance, which was pleasant to herself, and which she never supposed could be open to animadversion, since it was carried on under her husband's eyes, and as she believed, with his entire approval.

The dissipation in which May indulged, had produced the natural effect of giving rise to selfish, and self-indulgent habits; and the system of plot and counter-plot, of petty opposition, reluctant yielding, and angry manœuvres to avoid him, which her civil war with her cousin produced, had in some degree blunted her perceptions of rectitude, and accustomed her only too much, to seek the expedient, instead of the right. Never had she so greatly needed a guiding hand, a gentle curb as now, and never had she been left so completely to her own resources; her husband gave up the reins, at the moment when he should have exerted a steady authority; and with all her acquaintance, she had not a

female friend to speak a word of caution or of remonstrance.

Accompanied by her elegant admirer, and nominally guarded by her husband, Mrs. Cameron drove to the artist's, settled on the size, nature, and minor particulars of her portrait, arranged for a first sitting next week, and then, having a few calls to make, parted with Captain Mountsteven, only to encounter him again when she adjourned to the park.

The afternoon was so mild, bright, and spring-like, that the young lady was seized with a sudden desire to take a walk in Kensington Gardens, Mr. Cameron allowed her to do as she pleased, as he always did; and in pursuance of her fancy they adjourned to the Gardens, accompanied as usual by Mountsteven. May was cheerful and talkative; she fancied she had not been quite kind enough to her husband that morning, and as she always did under such circumstances, she wished to compensate for former pettishness, by smiles and friendly discourse. She would not allow the young man to engross her entirely; she would not permit him either to talk only on topics which did not interest her husband; nor would she bestow on

him as she was too apt to do, the largest share of her smiles and conversation.

She was in her best and most amiable of moods, and whilst he heard her merry tones, and was exhilarated by her kind and affectionate manners, her husband congratulated himself on the forbearance which had, as he believed, secured her from unnecessary pain and vexation; whilst it had saved him from what was the subject of his nervous fear, the making himself contemptible and ridiculous.

They had not gone very far without meeting acquaintances, some of whom joined them in their stroll; and May was in the centre of a group of fashionables when her attention was suddenly demanded by her cousin, and a companion of his, whom she well remembered, and whom she had secretly longed to meet again.

"May," said Wildey, as he approached her, with a countenance and manner in which embarrassment and apology were blended together, "I am glad to meet you; I have brought you one who wishes to reclaim his former right to be called a friend. You remember, I am sure, Lord Marcus."

She did remember him perfectly, and all her

indignation at his former conduct, and her wish to see him once more to testify that indignation rushed into her memory at once. Her colour heightened; it was not the blush of pleasure, however, which dyed her cheek, it was an angry glow, and her compressed lips, lowering brow, and cold, stately salutation, marked her feelings on the occasion. After a stiff bow, she placed her hand almost mechanically in her husband's arm, and leaning a little past him, addressed some indifferent observation to a young lady who was walking on Mr. Cameron's right hand, intended to shew the small importance which she attached to meeting Lord Marcus.

Probably he was a little astonished at the more than indifference which her air manifested; he was an impudent, self-possessed man, however, with eyes which delighted to look a pretty woman out of countenance, and a profusion of beard and whiskers, possibly cultivated to suit the fashions of the French capital; his good looks, his title, and his fluent flattery had not accustomed him to meet with so decided a repulse, and the novelty of the thing, perhaps, surprised and amused him. He did not, at all events, appear daunted, but after coolly observing

that it gave him great pleasure to meet Mrs. Cameron again, he turned to some others of the party, several of them being acquaintances, especially Captain Mountsteven, with whom he seemed on intimate terms.

They walked on, and the path requiring a division, the young lady before alluded to said rather audibly to May.

"Heavens, Mrs. Cameron, how ungracious you were to Lord Marcus! don't you know he is one of the most fashionable men about town? you do not play your cards well, my dear."

"I know enough of Lord Marcus, I assure you, dear Lady Maria," returned May, "it was not I who blundered in the game, or mistook the colour of the suit."

Lord Marcus was so near that he heard both question and reply; he had not formed the remotest idea as to May's real motive for her cold reception; he was more likely to ascribe it to pique that he had not sooner sought her, than to indignation at what had formerly occurred, and May's words did not tend to enlighten him. He tried several times to address her, with the expectation of conciliating her favour, but un-

successfully; she appeared resolved to slight him, and in a fit of scorn, and to shew her total indifference, she allowed and encouraged a style of address from Mountsteven which she had never before tolerated.

Perhaps too the young soldier was influenced at the moment by his vanity, prompting him to display before the baffled nobleman, his own superior success; certainly his manner suddenly assumed a degree of tenderness, admiration, and devotion much beyond what was usual. This became the more conspicuous, as the ladies of the party left Mrs. Cameron, and there only remained together the two last comers, and the original trio. May's feelings were in a flutter which made her hardly conscious of the lengths to which they carried her; Mr. Cameron was more than usually uncomfortable, and endeavoured in consequence to look more than usually calm and unconcerned. Lord Marcus surveyed them with an air of curiosity and amusement provokingly impertinent, whilst James Wildey was frantic at the extraordinary excess to which his cousin was permitting the devotions of the man whom he dreaded and detested.

This state of things was terminated by Lord Marcus and James Wildey suddenly taking leave, and retreating together from the scene.

"That was the old friend I promised you, Mrs. Cameron," observed Mountsteven, when they were gone, "but you do not seem particularly glad to see him."

"How comes your cousin to be on such terms of intimacy with that individual?" inquired her husband at the same moment.

"How comes James Wildey to know that bearded barbarian?" repeated May, "indeed I do not know; but the acquaintance is of some standing."

"Oh, I can tell you," replied Mountsteven, "Lord Marcus owes him money, which it is not convenient to pay, except in extra civility. And may I say it of your cousin?" turning to May as he spoke, "the creditor is very willing to accept such interest for his debt, and considers an introduction to a peer as equivalent to cent per cent on the original outlay. Are you angry with me for my opinion?"

"No," replied May, languidly, "you may say what you like of my cousin James, I do not care."

"I am so tired, May," observed her husband,

"and I am sure you must be so to; do let us go home if you please."

She assented to both propositions, and they immediately repaired to the carriage. Mr Cameron was regarding her anxiously as they drove along, his expression was troubled and uneasy. Engrossed in her own thoughts, she did not notice it, until their arrival at home, when as he assisted her from the carriage it caught her eye.

"What is the matter?" said she, retaining his arm as they walked into the house together, she looked up earnestly in his face, she had a sort of consciousness that she had not behaved quite well, and that she deserved a scolding; she was not particularly fond of lectures from any one though certainly she had not much reason to fear the gentle remonstrances of her husband. Still the idea that he was preparing a lecture made her uneasy, and since it seemed inevitable, she resolved boldly to meet, and have done with it. It did not suit her temper to live in dread of impending evil, shrinking from it, and thereby prolonging the state of discomfort, so she accompanied him across the hall to the door of his study, to give him the opportunity of ex-

pressing the disapprobation which she was certain he must feel. He did not answer her first question, only looking down on her, as she clung to his arm, with a doubtful, hesitating expression.

She repeated it, adding, "are you displeased with me, Mr. Cameron?"

"I am very tired," was his only reply, as they entered the room together.

She pushed a large easy chair up to him, and made him seat himself, then leaning on the arm herself, she continued.

"Now, do say it at once, Mr. Cameron, and do not keep me in suspense, tell me I behaved ill and that you are angry with me!"

"Indeed, I am not," replied he, taking in his the hand which she laid on his shoulder, "do I look cross, May?"

"No, you look as you always do, very kind and good—too good a great deal—and too indulgent to such a self-willed wife as you have."

"My dear May, how can you talk so; I am sure you are anything but self-willed; and I hope you do not suppose, that I am incapable of making allowances for your youth and youthful spirits. I don't mean to say," continued he in

an apologetic tone, as if he was afraid of going too far, "that I should not have been as well pleased if you had not been a little more—or perhaps less—what shall I say, devoted to—engrossed by that Captain Mountsteven; but then, I cannot wonder if you do like to be flattered and admired at your age, so we will think no more of it."

"My dear Mr. Cameron, you make me so ashamed of myself," replied May, with tears in her eyes, "you offer the excuses and apologies for me, which I ought to make, or rather which I ought not to have to make for myself. Indeed, you are too good, I don't deserve it."

"My dear girl, who should make excuses and allowances for you, except your husband; did I not promise to be kind to you, and if I were harsh, could I expect you to be considerate? I know that in marrying me you sacrificed a great deal, and every year makes the disparity of our age greater, and requires more indulgence, more allowance on your part; I feel that you have the most to bear with, and am truly sensible of your kind forbearance towards me and my peculiarities."

May stooped over him, and kissed his fore-

head; she could not at that moment command her voice sufficiently to answer, her heart was swelling with a variety of feelings; affection towards her husband, compunction for her frequent negligence of him; self-reproach at the occasional scornful and slighting thoughts in which she had allowed herself to indulge, when witnessing his old-fashioned habits, or the ridicule of them in thought, if not in fact, which a contrast with more fashionable society had often excited.

Her emotions almost suffocated her, and several minutes silence succeeded; at length, she recovered herself, and noticing how pale and weary he appeared, she thought with regret of their evening's engagements.

"I wish we were not going out to-night," she suddenly exclaimed.

"So do I, my dear, with all my heart," was his reply.

"If it were only the balls, I would not go, but one cannot stay away from Lady Anne's dinner-party, unless indeed, I send an excuse, and say you are not well. Shall I?"

He hesitated, but the fear of being thought

exigeant prevented his acceding, as he really wished to do.

"No, no, you shall go without me, May, I do not feel equal to going; but that need not keep you at home, I am not so ill as that, and you can carry my apology."

"Well, if you think that best, so I will but I do not care about the dinner at all Captain Mountsteven told me who we should meet there, and there is nobody I care about."

"Is he to be there himself?" inquired her husband.

"Oh yes, Lady Anne is his cousin, you know."

It was a great exertion of magnanimity on Mr. Cameron's part, that after this information he did not withdraw his consent, and prevail on May to stay at home. But he would not give way to a feeling of jealousy, or allow even to himself that it would be better that his wife should not meet her young admirer; so instead of asking her to remain with him, he urged her to go and dress at once, and come to him again before she started, as he liked to see how she looked.

She left the room accordingly, and he threw himself on a sofa, and taking up a pamphlet on Free Trade, soon dropped asleep over its pages.

CHAPTER III.

PUCK. And now they never meet in grove, or green,
By fountain clear, or spangled starlight sheen,
But they do square; that all their elves for fear,
Creep into acorn cups, and hide them there.

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM.

MAY proceeded slowly up stairs, forming all sorts of prudent resolutions as to her conduct that evening, deciding that it should be "wisest, virtuousest, discreetest, best," determining that henceforth and for ever, she would abstain from flirtation and levity, and behave in a way, which should prove her worthy of the kind and indulgent husband, with whom she was so fortunately blessed.

Her good resolutions were, however, put to flight in a moment, and all thoughts of a kindly

nature were suddenly startled away, by the apparition which met her eye on entering her own boudoir, for there advanced to meet her from one of the windows, as soon as she had closed the door, James Wildey himself. Indignation and alarm were the immediate feelings which his presence excited, but she rallied herself after the first shock, (for she had been very near running away,) and resolved to stand her ground with firmness and resolution. She raised her head with an air of proud and rather scornful surprise, and demanded to what accident she was indebted for an intrusion so very unexpected.

"May, I must speak to you," replied he, and it is because I wished to speak to you alone, that I came here, everywhere else you are surrounded with idle crowds."

"Well, then speak and be brief, for I am in a hurry, and have not even time to quarrel with you. What is it now?"

"Tell me then, May, why, in total disregard of good manners, and in opposition to my wishes, you turned away so contemptuously from my friend Lord Marcus?"

"And tell me, then, why in opposition to my

known opinion, and in total disregard of all good morals, you persisted in forcing on my notice, an individual whom you know to be so peculiarly disagreeable and obnoxious to me," retorted May, angrily.

"Pshaw, May," ejaculated her cousin impatiently, "how can you be so especially absurd. You took that fancy into your head months ago that Lord Marcus meant to insult you; I should have expected you would be wiser by this time, knowing as you do so much more of the world. Because when you were poor and dependent, he did not address you with the devotion due to a duchess, you were affronted, and now turn your back upon one of the most influential men of his party, without the least regard to the advantages to be derived from his acquaintance."

"I suppose my ideas of dignity and decorum are different from yours, James Wildey. But if a man would treat me with less respect and deference because I was dependent, than he would evince were I a duchess, I can only say, I despise that man, and shall without scruple turn my back on him when he presents himself."

"You shall not, May!" exclaimed Wildey, hastily.

"Oh!" was her reply in the calmest, but at
e same time, the most provoking manner in
e world. Her cousin felt he was ridiculous to
t himself in such a state of excitement, and
at he gave her an undesirable advantage over
m.

"I do not mean to contradict you," he said,
er a moment's silence and deliberation, "you
uld be perfectly right in your conduct under
ch circumstances; but the thing that vexes
e, dear May, is to see you giving way to vain
ncies, and acting on them in a way to make
urself conspicuous and ridiculous. Supposing,
r rather admitting that Lord Marcus was
rmerly impertinent or presuming, really, it
rikes me it would be more correctly feminine,
ore lady-like, more delicate, to forget it all in
ppearance, and since he is disposed to adopt a
ew line of conduct, to make believe, that the
st is really consigned to oblivion. Why
ould you attach so much importance to a
ffle which occurred months ago?"

"If Lord Marcus' passing impertinence to
e, were all I knew of him, it would not per-
ps be worth while to recall the circumstance;

but I am acquainted with his character by report, and I know him to be a profligate man, a *roué*, one who ought not to be countenanced in female society."

"That is a most unnecessary affectation of prudery, on your part; you must know that he is universally well received, that you will meet him in the best and highest society, and that for you, a young woman to set your face against a man on moral principles, whom all the rest of your sex admire and encourage, is erecting yourself into a censor of morals in a way most unbecoming and unfeminine, and appearing to know a great deal more than you ought to do, of the wickedness of the world. Depend upon it, the most delicate and correct way to act, is to appear to be ignorant of all wrong, and receive those whom you meet in good society, as if, as a matter of course, they had unblemished characters."

"Our creeds differ so materially, James," said she composedly, "that I suspect they are founded on totally opposite principles. What is it to me, if all the rest of the female world should degrade themselves and encourage vice, by per-

mitting the society of a bad man? Because they did their utmost to confound the rules of right and wrong, and make rectitude and morality seem of no consequence, would that be any excuse for my following their example? But it is not so, really. The idle, the careless, the thoughtless, may perhaps appear indifferent on the subject, may take things easily, and not trouble themselves to consider anything but fashion and amusement; but there are numbers of women who think like me, and there are circles from which the character of Lord Marcus entirely excludes him, although he is the son of a duke, and a man of great wealth."

"You will meet him to night at Lady Anne's —be civil at least, if you are cold; it is due to your hostess and your own character."

"I cannot act the hypocrite, or affect to be complaisant to a man I detest."

"May, who has set you against Lord Marcus in this way? is it Mountsteven?"

"He never mentioned his name to me, until to-day."

"But if you are so resolutely bent on repressing vice, and encouraging virtue, if you are so

determined to carry on a crusade against all good-for-nothing young men—why do you allow the attentions of that young soldier, who is ever at your side. May, May, you are inconsistent!"

"I will not be questioned or lectured on the subject of my friendships by you, James; whilst they have the sanction of my husband's presence and approval, who dares find fault with them, or question their propriety?" replied Mrs. Cameron, somewhat warmly.

"I do," replied he, boldly; "I must, and will question, both the prudence and propriety of your conduct towards Captain Mountsteven. What could be more outrageously marked than your flirtation with him in Kensington Gardens to-day? What will become of your character, if you thus trifle with it? Do you suppose that because your husband is blind to the fact that your acquaintance are all blind also—do you flatter yourself you will escape notice because you repulse with indignant virtue a man whom you dislike, whilst you admit the addresses of another whom you prefer? Yes—you may frown, and look scornful—but it is truth that I

speak, it is disagreeable no doubt—truth often is—but it is not the less necessary!"

"I will not condescend to answer an attack so perfectly uncalled for, and unjustifiable. I make no attempt at exculpation, it would degrade me. My husband was present, to him alone I am answerable, and he has already declared himself satisfied with my conduct. What have you then to do with it?"

"May, you must attend to me, or it will be the worse for you!"

"I defy your threats—I do more—I desire you to leave my house—you have no right to interfere here; I have done much for you, I have borne much from you, because in a moment of weakness, I made you a promise to that effect—but there is a limit to my patience and my complaisance. You have reached that limit—now begone—lest I pull down at once the fortune I have helped to build up. Begone, I say!"

"May, you will repent these words," replied he rising and advancing to the door. "Do you think me powerless—you are wrong—and I can yet avenge myself!" He hastily quitted the room, as he spoke.

Left alone, she sat down in great emotion, the indignation and scorn which had upheld her vanished in solitude; fear of her cousin's power and malevolence returned and filled her mind, she had defied and driven him away; he had left her in anger; what the result might be she could scarcely imagine, but she felt sure that he would unscrupulously pursue his own objects, and would sacrifice anything or anyone who stood in his way.

She roused herself from reflection to dress for the dinner, and having taken a kind farewell of her husband, she started for her evening's amusement, without being able to make up her mind whether she should or should not proceed to fulfil her other engagements.

Lady Anne piqued herself on being a woman of science and learning, and delighted in assembling at her table men who were remarkable in various ways. The party consisted, in consequence, of many who were total strangers to Mrs. Cameron, and to her surprise she learned from her hostess, that her great ally, her ladyship's own cousin, Captain Mountsteven, had, at the very last hour, given up his place to Lord Marcus, who, by virtue of a surprising

beard, and a recent excursion to Mexico and California in a yacht, had become an individual of considerable notoriety. Lady Anne had met the gentlemen just after they had parted from May, and had succeeded in negociating the exchange.

Mrs. Cameron heard the arrangement on the whole with philosophy; she was not in a humour to wish for anything like sentimental conversation, and rather desired to be paired off with the most learned and silent of Lady Anne's collection, one who would talk no nonsense, or perhaps not talk at all. She felt she should like to have her thoughts to herself. Her wishes were in part gratified, and she found herself seated at dinner beside a learned professor, with whose name she was well acquainted, standing as it did in an eminent position in the scientific world.

She began by expecting to practise patient endurance; she was most agreeably disappointed; her companion excelled in conversational powers, and the suavity of his manners, and his readiness to impart information, were quite equal to the fund of amusing anecdote, and instructive

observation, which would not fail to delight an intelligent companion.

May's excited feelings were soothed, and her thoughts completely carried out of herself during the hours she passed by the Professor's side.

But the most agreeable dinner will come to an end, as well as the most stupid one, and at length the signal for withdrawal being made by the hostess, the ladies were left to their own resources, to fill up the time until carriages were announced.

Lady Anne approached Mrs. Cameron.

"You have no idea," said she, smilingly, "I dare say, what we were talking of at dinner, my dear Mrs. Cameron, unless your cheek burnt very much; we were discussing you!"

"Indeed, who were the we, Lady Anne?"

"Lord Marcus and myself; you have no idea how he admires you; he raves of your beauty and grace; you are piquante, delightful, lovely, captivating; oh, in short, you have made a complete conquest of his lordship's heart and understanding. Are you not immensely flattered?"

"No, not at all."

"Oh, fie; you must not tell little fibs, you now, it's not moral or pretty; and to be lmired or praised by Lord Marcus is what all omen covet."

"I do not like Lord Marcus, dear Lady nne."

"No! why not, may I ask?"

"I do not like the colour of his coat," replied lay, very demurely.

"Charming, I will tell his lordship so the st opportunity," cried her ladyship, "I suppse you like red coats better, my dear."

May made no answer, and her hostess left r to repeat this brilliant observation to some ıe else.

Mrs. Cameron's deliberations as to whether ıe should or should not go to another party ıat evening, were brought to a conclusion by ıe solicitations of one of the other ladies, who as earnest in suggesting that they should go gether; and in consequence, it was arranged ıat Lady Campbell's carriage, just then anounced, should convey them away immediately, ıd they left the drawing-room before the entlemen returned to it.

There was, of course, a great crowd, and all the other inconveniences attending a fashionable assembly; but having succeeded in making their way to the ball-room, it was not long before May's hand was solicited by sundry cavaliers, and she soon found herself going through the evolutions of the polka. Dancing, music, and flattery always excited her spirits, and produced a sort of intoxication of the brain, but it brightened her eyes, and increased her personal attractions. At the conclusion of the first polka, she found herself suddenly approached by Lord Marcus, who requested the honour of her hand. Without the least regard to the forms of etiquette, or concerning herself for anything, except her desire of shewing her dislike to the gentleman, she flatly refused him; and a moment after, before he had moved away, whilst he was preparing a touching speech about her inexorable cruelty, and his own small merits, she as coolly accepted an offer to dance, made to her by Valentine Mountsteven, who hastily approaching, declared he had been looking for her everywhere in a state of desperation.

Lord Marcus looked on with an air the most benign and smiling, and observed:

"I see you told the truth to Lady Anne; it is the colour of my coat to which you object."

He then moved away, leaving May a little annoyed at what had passed. She had hoped that he would have been vexed, or, at least indignant at her refusal; he did not seem to mind it at all; and there was a something in his look and tone, as he glanced at her present partner, which uncomfortably reminded her of her cousin's angry remonstrances, and her husband's kind forbearance.

Mentally she resolved to be careful in her conduct, calm and friendly to Mountsteven, but repressing all appearance of devotion, and avoiding all tendency to flirtation. It was evident her confusion had not escaped him, he was looking at her intently, as if trying to read her feleings. A little silence was interrupted by his speaking.

"Those were mystic words which his lordship just pronounced, I presume, since they produce so lively an effect on you; to my ears

they seemed matter-of-fact enough, although not exactly *à-propos* to anything. It would not be discreet, perhaps, to ask why they have checked your mirth, and saddened your smiles?"

"Certainly not; you must make no inquiries on the subject."

"Well, then, if I am not to share in the knowledge, and thereby participate in their effects, I must claim as my right, whilst I am your partner, that you do not allow them to overshadow your countenance. Were he dancing with you himself, Lord Marcus would have a right to vex you, of course, for his own amusement; but he has no business to interfere with you now, or to defraud me of your smiles. I must beg, therefore, that you will put by all unpleasant considerations for his company, and treat me as I deserve."

May was about to reply with a lively smile, when her eye suddenly caught the countenance of her cousin, who was standing at a short distance, intently watching her. The change in her colour and expression was visible to her partner, who had at that moment encircled her

waist with his arm, preparatory to the waltz. His glance followed hers, and he instantaneously perceived the object which attracted her; without pausing for a moment, he started off in the dance, and conveyed the lady away in apparently the most natural manner in the world, from the basilisk which had occasioned such a mental shock. After a couple of turns round the room, still carefully marking that Wildey continued in the same spot, he paused at the further extremity of the saloon, remarked that his partner appeared fatigued, and leading her aside into a smaller apartment, seated her on a sofa to rest.

He had not been so much in May's society without making the discovery that though her husband was so indulgent as to be no object of dread, her cousin exercised an extraordinary influence over her mind and actions; and that on many occasions she had appeared unable to avoid not doing certain actions, or not going to certain places, which he had reason to think she was particularly anxious to do. There was a mystery in this which he was desirous to make out, the more so, as he had suspicions

that this same cousin was trying to interfere between Mrs. Cameron and himself.

Captain Mountsteven liked May very much on her own account, and it flattered his vanity to be acknowledged as her favourite. To be the companion, the *cavaliere-servente* of one of the prettiest women of the season, gave him a pleasant degree of excitement; but he did not now carry his views farther. His flirtation with her was intended to be a strictly correct and decorous one, which the disposition of her husband rendered particularly easy. Of the danger attending such a course of conduct he thought nothing, and she knew nothing, or, if Wildey's remonstrances had partially opened her eyes, they had made her too angry for her to admit their truth.

They both of them resented an interference which they felt to be disagreeable, and believed to be unnecessary, and they scorned the appearance of being influenced by such a man. Whether Captain Mountsteven would have abstained from his present course of conduct had it produced disagreement with Mr. Cameron must be doubtful, as it was never proved; but

he could not consider himself responsible to May's cousin, and the evident ill-will with which Wildey had for some time regarded him, excited contempt, but not fear with him. He was not quite certain as to the origin of the clerk's unfriendly feeling. He had at first supposed it to arise from virtuous indignation at his own character; but the introduction of such a man as Lord Marcus, whose conduct had made him notorious, to May, when living in Wildey's own house—a fact which Mountsteven had learned from Lord Marcus himself—quite forbade this idea. There could be no particular regard to rectitude or morality in a man who could present such an acquaintance to a young girl. But be his reason what it might, or his objections ever so well-founded, the enmity of a man so much beneath him in society—one whose existence he would have utterly ignored, but for his relationship to Mrs. Cameron, was not likely to affect his amusements or interfere with any favourite pursuit.

Having seated his partner on a sofa, his object now was to discover why she feared her cousin; and falling in with what he fancied to be the thought uppermost in her mind, he observed

in a quiet way, as if answering some previous remark:

"He is out of sight now; how do you think he came here?"

"I am sure I cannot tell," answered May, quite thrown off her guard by the manner of her companion, and forgetting that he did not know all about Wildey's connection with her concerns; "I suppose he got somebody to introduce him—Lord Marcus, perhaps."

"Ah, very likely; he knew you were to be here, and so followed you as usual. He is careful, if not a kind guardian. How much you must be attached to him!"

"Indeed, I am not."

"Then, is the attachment all on his side? or why does he always watch you?"

"You must ask him these questions. I cannot pretend to fathom the depths of his mysterious mind."

"Perhaps, he might think it a little impertinent of me to intrude into such secrets,' answered Captain Mountsteven, "more especially as I have an idea that I am no particular favourite of his already. What do you

say to that—what does he say to you about me?"

"These are questions you are not authorized to ask. His opinion of you, if imparted to me was superscribed 'private and confidential;' so you must do without that knowledge at least."

"Very well, *je puis m'en passer*. I do not know that I consider his opinions on any subject as precisely the most important in the world. There are those on whose judgment and taste I should place more reliance. Indeed, although he is your cousin, Mrs. Cameron, you must allow me to say that he has such a very impertinent way of scrutinizing us whenever he happens to see us together, that I am often tempted to inquire what he means by it."

"Oh, but indeed you must not; I cannot allow any quarrelling in which my name can possibly be mixed up. You must take no notice of his looks—they do not deserve it; indeed, it would be paying him much too great a compliment."

As May spoke, their solitude was suddenly broken in on by the entrance of others. Hitherto, there had not been more than a few other couples in the room, engaged in suc

earnest conversation that they probably forgot all but themselves and each other, and heard nothing of what was passing around them. May was sitting with her back to the door, but Captain Mountsteven, who was leaning over the end of the sofa as he talked to her, commanded a full view of it, and at this moment he saw Wildey enter in company with Lord Marcus.

To be thus followed and haunted by this man irritated him not a little, and May's caution but that moment uttered, scarcely saved him from giving some audible demonstration of his annoyance. Mrs. Cameron herself, was not aware of their entrance until Lord Marcus stood close beside her, when, with an exclamation at the pleasantness of this retreat, he seated himself on a chair exactly *vis-à-vis* to the lady. Wildey did not sit down, but placing himself immediately behind his companion, he regarded the couple on whom they intruded with an air of menace and indignation.

May rose haughtily, and turning to her partner, said she had rested sufficiently, and was ready to return to the dance. She took his arm and was about to leave the room, when

her cousin stopped her with an urgent request for her hand in the next waltz. She impatiently shook off his fingers which he had laid on her arm to attract her attention, and replied hurriedly that she was engaged.

"I must dance with you, May," said he, urgently; "it is so long since we have danced together. When is your hand at liberty?"

Her partner, meantime, was trying gently to draw her away. She was willing enough to yield to the impulse, and only staying to reply that she was engaged for three dances, allowed herself to be led off to the ball-room. She did not dance, however; she was not equal to the exertion. He felt her hand was trembling in his arm, her colour varied and her eyes were full of tears. She seemed altogether so greatly excited and discomposed, that instead of falling into the circle of waltzers, he conducted her round the room, seated her in a corner by his own mother, and remarking to the latter that Mrs. Cameron was not quite well, left her there whilst he went to try and find her carriage, "for," added he, "I am sure you had better go home at once."

She readily agreed to this proposal, and, in less than ten minutes, she was safely placed in her own carriage, and conveyed to Hyde Park Gardens. Whether it was from fatigue, excitement, or annoyance, she could not exactly tell, but she cried the whole way home, without troubling herself to assign any reason for her tears, or being able to decide, whether they flowed from past disappointments, present vexations, or fears for the future.

Be their source and origin what it might, certain it is that they did not cease the whole time her maid was undressing her, nor for a considerable period after her head was laid on her pillow; until, at length, she fairly sobbed herself to sleep, and dreamt incoherently of Lord Marcus and James Wildey.

"I suspect, Wildey," said his companion to him, when the others had quitted the room, "you do not possess quite so much power as you fancied over your pretty cousin. You say you can make her do as you please, but you have failed to prove your words. She is as scornful to me, and as encouraging to Mountsteven as ever."

Wildey looked nettled at this observation, but answered "that he had no doubt in a short time to succeed in detaching her altogether from Mountsteven's society."

"I really do think it a pity," continued his lordship, "that such a pleasing young woman should be allowed to ruin herself; upon my honour, if I could only get a hearing from her, I would preach her a lesson on imprudence myself; for any child could guess how the intimacy between a lovely young wife and a good-looking lover will end."

"I think you do my cousin injustice," replied Wildey, warmly. "She has not a thought of evil; it is ignorance and innocence which prompt her conduct."

"Sweet little lamb! but that is just what I say. Her indulgent husband is no restraint, and complacently shuts his eyes to the *tendre amitié* which he cannot prevent. These sort of May and December marriages never really answer in England, because when the young wife amuses herself with a young lover, a great scandal is raised; the husband is forced to arouse himself, and the lady's character pays

the penalty. It is a pity, I say; and you ought to prevent it!"

"So I will, most certainly; but it surprises me to hear moralizing from your lordship; it is something like the wolf sentimentalizing on the fate of Red-Riding Hood."

"Perhaps so; but what do you mean to do to save your cousin? The best course for you, in my opinion, is to speak to the Captain, and tell him your mind."

"I think not; it would lead to a quarrel and a challenge."

"Pshaw! are you afraid, then?"

"I hope your lordship will do me the credit of believing that it is not personal fear which makes me shrink from the danger; a quarrel with Mountsteven in which her name was involved, might materially damage Mrs. Cameron's character; as to any other effects it would be likely to superinduce, I really cannot imagine what they would be."

Wildey suspected, and perhaps not without reason, that his noble friend was desirous to make a cat's-paw of himself, and that he would have liked to see him involved in a quarrel of

this nature; which, be its results in other respects what they might, would probably serve to widen the breach between himself and May, even if it should also banish Mountsteven from her presence.

No sooner did he discover that his cousin had quitted the ball-room, than he also became anxious to withdraw; his reason for appearing there had been to follow her footsteps, and his object in bearing with Lord Marcus himself, and submitting to his somewhat scornful and supercilious patronage, was, as Valentine Mountsteven correctly guessed, to obtain introductions into society, from which his own situation in life would otherwise have excluded him: he was thus enabled to mount guard on his cousin on occasions when she had hoped to escape from his surveillance, and he was firmly determined to do everything in his power to induce her to leave off her flattering encouragement to the Captain, even if to do so, it became necessary to speak to her husband on the subject. Wildey's other plans had been on the whole tolerably successful; he had expelled from the counting-house those among the clerks whose incorruptible fidelity and honesty he feared, and

where it was absolutely necessary to fill their places, he had done so with creatures of his own, whose principles would not stand in his way.

The claims of a young wife, and the round of dissipation into which she plunged, had materially interfered with Mr. Cameron's attention to his own concerns. There was rarely a time in which he could repair to the city to examine into the state of affairs in general, and none at all for such attention and inspection, as would have enabled the merchant to discover or trace out, the various frauds and deceptions practised upon him.

Wildey felt tolerably safe in this respect, safe as a man can feel with a very restless and uneasy conscience. When Mr. Cameron did endeavour to investigate what he wished to conceal, he had no great difficulty in misleading and perplexing him; and none at all in making him imagine, that under the scrupulous attention of so exemplary a superintendent as himself, the merchant might trust to everything being done in the most correct and business-like way.

But with regard to his cousin, Wildey encountered more difficulty than he had expected.

May was intractable, self-willed, opposed to him on many points, and extremely vexatious in the way she shewed her opposition.

When he looked at Mr. Cameron and saw how his health had lately failed, how rapidly old age seemed creeping on him, and when he calculated the few years which he was likely to live, he became half frantic with jealous anger, for he felt strongly that May preferred Mountsteven to himself, and that in case of her being a widow, as in the course of nature she would probably be soon, he should have so poor a chance of gaining her hand. His indignation made him take a most injudicious course, in this particular instance. Instead of trying stealthily to supersede the rival whom he feared, instead of endeavouring to win May's regard, or to insinuate himself into her confidence, to establish an affectionate intercourse such as their relationship admitted, and gently to use the power which he had over her, so as to control without annoying her, he had begun by open tyranny, and had alienated from himself all remains of the interest she had once entertained for him. He had forced himself on her society at all times, and exacted from her sacrifices of friendship and

inclination, which were little likely to conciliate her regard, or to make her think of him with kindly feelings.

Yet so much was he blinded by his passions, that he did not seem aware how extremely injudicious his conduct had been, and only wondered that its results were not more agreeable to his wishes.

CHAPTER IV.

Weaving spiders come not here,
Hence, you long-legged spinners, hence,
Beetles black approach not near,
Worm nor snail do no offence.
Never harm, nor spell, nor charm,
Come our lady lovely nigh.

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM.

It was from a train of thoughts suggested by such considerations that Wildey suddenly roused himself with the intention of returning home. As he was leaving the ball-room, he again encountered Lord Marcus and Captain Mountsteven together. The former addressed him instantly.

"I have been inquiring of my friend here, why he whisked off your pretty cousin so abruptly, Wildey, when she was engaged to you.

I am sure you must be immensely obliged to a gentleman who takes such care of your relative's constitution, for he says she was ill."

"I am sorry to hear it," observed Wildey, gravely.

"I don't think Wildey seems sufficiently grateful for your services Mountsteven," persisted Lord Marcus; "I only wish she were *my* cousin that I might thank you in her name, as you deserve—but you see I have nothing to do with her."

"I do not see that the simple fact of my seeing a lady to her carriage requires any notice or thanks from Mr. Wildey, or any one else," replied the young officer coldly; "it was at her request I acted, and her thanks are sufficient; nor do I see why any of her cousins, were there fifty of them, need interfere."

Wildey bit his lip, and then replied, "my cousin is of course well able to express her own thanks for the persevering kindness of Captain Mountsteven's attentions. No doubt both she and Mr. Cameron feel them duly: the thanks I apprehend on such a subject would be more appropriate from her husband than from a distant relative like myself."

"Very true," answered Mountsteven, "and as I shall call to inquire to-morrow how she is, Mr. Cameron probably will discharge all such obligations on that occasion."

Wildey bowed and withdrew; a brilliant idea had suddenly entered his head, and he returned home to meditate upon it in private.

Mr. Cameron was quietly breakfasting alone the next morning before May's eyes had opened to the light of day, when in pursuance of this new plan, James Wildey entered. His unexpected appearance not only surprised but alarmed the merchant, and his thoughts naturally taking the direction of the city and the counting-house, he inquired with anxious trepidation if anything was the matter there.

The clerk replied by an entreaty not to alarm or agitate himself; he had, it was true, called on a very serious business; a most serious and important affair indeed; but still he hoped Mr. Cameron would take it calmly; and here he stopped abruptly.

Of course such an announcement was certain to excite still more uneasiness, and the merchant's agitation became apparent; his countenance turned deadly pale; his trembling hand dropped the spoon, with which he had been nervously

stirring his chocolate; he upset his egg upon the floor in his trepidation, but without noticing this in the least, he sat attentively gazing at his companion's face.

With a well-affected look of pitying concern, Wildey withdrew his own eyes, and bent them on the floor as if too much overpowered to look up.

"Good heavens, you know not how you frighten me Wildey!" exclaimed Mr. Cameron, at last breaking the silence, "tell me it is not bankruptcy you fear?"

"No, no, Sir—happily the house is safe—it is not connected with commercial affairs that I have unpleasant communications to make—perhaps, however, you might wish that it were," continued he as he bent down to pick up the fragments of the egg and cup scattered on the floor. "There is a worse bankruptcy than that of a commercial house."

This was said so low that though intended to be very effective, it was lost on the auditor; and Mr. Cameron after waiting a short time said, somewhat impatiently,

"Do leave those things, Wildey—it's of no consequence; the servant will do that—and tell me what you are alluding to."

"I am very sorry to be obliged to say what is unpleasant, my dear Sir," pursued Wildey, reseating himself, and speaking with mournful pathos, "nothing but my strong sense of duty to you as well as myself—my feelings of family honour—for I have such feelings, subordinate as my situation is—and my desire to avoid still worse and more terrible consequences than your present distress, would induce me to interfere. My motives, dear Mr. Cameron, must be my excuse —my connection with you; a connection which is my highest boast, my regard, my responsibility —all urge me to speak, and to speak plainly. But I wish you fully to appreciate these motives.

"My dear Wildey, I must entreat you to speak out. I will give you credit for every good motive under the sun, if you will only be direct and plain. Since you say it does not concern my commercial credit, I can bear anything. My honour as a merchant safe, you need not hesitate to state the subject of alarm."

"And have you nothing dearer to you than your mercantile honour?" inquired the clerk, bending forward earnestly, and speaking in a solemn tone.

"Nothing, except my wife, and she is safe this house."

"She is in the house," repeated the other "but is she safe?"

Mr. Cameron started back—the look, the tone, the words, all alarmed him excessively.

"In the name of heaven, Wildey, what do you mean? What has happened to Mrs. Cameron? What is it you fear?"

Terror deprived him of further utterance, and his features seemed convulsed with the intensity of his feelings. He had not seen May that morning, and as Wildey hesitated to answer, he started up and was about to leave the room in search of her, or of some explanation, but his clerk stopped him.

"No, no, my dear Sir, violence will not do, abruptness may precipitate matters, but cannot mend them. Angry haste may realize our worst fears, whilst at present, they *are* only fears —upon my honour, I assure you—only fears."

"Let me go, Wildey, why do you stop me? If anything has happened to May, why must I not know it? angry haste, indeed!—what nonsense you talk, I *will* go to my wife at once!"

He broke from Wildey's hold, and hurried away; the other followed him as hastily; he was not certain to what extremes Mr. Cameron's impatience might lead; or what *contre-temps* might ensue from this movement on his part; he had only intended to instil a cautious jealousy into the husband's breast, and to make him forbid his house to his young rival, not to raise a storm which would betray his interference to his cousin herself.

Mr. Cameron thinking only of his wife, whom he feared to find indisposed, took no notice of Wildey. They ascended the stairs, passed through an ante-room, and another apartment which, in his hasty glimpse, the clerk hardly recognised as a dressing-room, and then Mr. Cameron softly pushing open a door, which stood ajar, and at which from his agitation he did not pause to knock, Wildey found himself at the entrance of his cousin's sleeping-room, and exactly *vis-à-vis* to her bed.

She was fast asleep; a few curls strayed from under the pretty cap which confined her hair, her hand extended on the coverlet, looked more than usually delicate as it peeped out from the

lace frill round her wrist, and the rosy glow which the pink curtains shed over the bed, as one sunbeam from the half-closed shutters glanced upon them, made her pale cheeks, from the contrast, seem the paler. Her cousin stood and gazed at the scene, and though conscious that he ought to withdraw, was too much fascinated by the sight, to find power to do so.

Her husband, meanwhile, had advanced softly to the bed-side, and bent over her with a look of the tenderest affection. He did not touch her, though he seemed at first about to kiss her cheek; then the traces of tears, which hung yet upon her eye-lashes, and the deep sob, which still occasionally heaved her breast, caught his attention, and he continued for some minutes to gaze at her with a troubled expression. The feelings of Wildey as he stood, during that interval, contemplating them both, were just such as he deserved to experience, and formed a proper punishment for his acts. A fallen angel at the gate of Paradise, might have so gazed on what he had himself forfeited.

Recollecting himself, however, at length he turned away, and softly retracing his steps

through the dressing-room, he waited in the ante-chamber until Mr. Cameron returned. He came, looking sad and uneasy; and taking Wildey's arm, led him back in silence to the breakfast-room.

"Now, tell me," said he, when they were again seated, "to what you allude. I see my wife has been in tears; you, perhaps, know the cause, explain if you can directly, and succinctly."

"I hardly suppose that her tears, whatever may have been their source, can have the same origin as my alarms. It is for her I fear, but she, I imagine, must be both unconscious and indifferent on this peculiar topic."

"Wildey, you prolong my suspense in a most unnecessary degree," replied Mr. Cameron very impatiently, "speak out—tell me, what have you to say of your cousin—my wife?"

"I do not blame *her*, indeed; I believe her to be as innocent as a seraph, but her innocence is her danger. I blame *him*; the man who, taking advantage of the friendly hospitality extended to him, and profiting by an ignorance of vice, almost angelic, yet can attempt to introduce

shame and disgrace irreparable, into a family where he has been met only with the warmest kindness; he is a villain!"

Mr. Cameron's face grew more agitated every moment; he seemed to have suddenly caught his companion's meaning; a meaning which had already been suggested to his own mind, by ideas scrupulously expelled as jealous follies. Perhaps, thought he, they were only too well founded. He remembered May's youth, her natural gaiety, her beauty, and her not unnatural love of admiration. Perhaps the affection of a man, old enough to be her grandfather, could not be expected to satisfy a lovely young woman; she had warmly admired Captain Mountsteven's personal appearance, on their first meeting, she was evidently fond of his society now. All these reflections rushed through his mind as he sat there, his eyes bent on the ground, his face crimson with emotion, and his hands unconsciously playing with his watch-chain and seals.

But the current of his thoughts took another direction. He thought of May's goodness, her generous, open, confiding nature, how, when she did a thoughtless thing, she quickly repented,

and acknowledged it, and how utterly she scorned anything which appeared approaching to the dishonourable, or the base—could she for a moment entertain the idea of betraying her husband's confidence, and dishonouring his name? no, impossible! she did not even deserve to be suspected of such a design; and as to Captain Mountsteven, it was very seldom, so far as he had seen, that his manners over-stepped the calm bounds of friendship, and but for the frequency of his visits, (that Mr. Cameron could not deny,) there really would have been nothing remarkable in the acquaintance.

Various other ideas followed in quick succession; the scene between Othello and Iago, flashed on his memory with no very flattering application to his companion and himself. It was not indeed quite the first time that a shadow of suspicion had crossed his mind, for his suspicion now amounted to little more than an undefined shadow; his imagination presented the idea, that Wildey was actuated by some unknown, but unfair motive; he began to mistrust him; various little incidents which had lately occurred, made him feel a vague suspicion of his truth;

and whilst he dared not, even to himself, put his misgivings into a definite form, he could not banish them entirely.

Meanwhile, Wildey sat for some minutes watching the face of his companion, and trying to make out his feelings from his features, but without much success. Tired of this, he spoke:

"I am extremely grieved to give you pain, my dear Sir; it is with the most sensible reluctance that I allude to it at all; but the necessity of taking some measures to avoid notoriety, and prevent scandal and gossip spreading farther, induced me to come to you this morning. The remarks which were made last night on Mrs. Cameron's conduct, and Captain Mountsteven's attentions, filled me equally with indignation and concern; for whilst I could not deny that appearances were against her, I knew well that she did not merit the slander which was circulated at her expense."

"You do not mean to say that you heard the matter publickly spoken of?" exclaimed Mr. Cameron; "that any one dared to call her conduct in question?"

"Calm yourself, my dear Sir, as I said before, angry explosions may alarm and irritate her; they may do harm, they never *can* do good. Convince her understanding, persuade her to sacrifice Captain Mountsteven's society; her real affection for you will of course yield it without a regret, where her reputation is at stake. You must forbid him the house, and she must avoid his society in public, that is all."

"And you are sure of your facts, Wildey; sure that it is no fancy of your own; sure that her conduct has really been the subject of unpleasant remark? Wildey, I will forgive you anything except slandering my wife."

The clerk kept his countenance of virtuous candour admirably.

"Upon my word and honour, I merely state the truth; nor do I slander my cousin. I only say what I know, that she is thoughtless and imprudent; the guilt, the intention of guilt, at least, undoubtedly lies entirely with Captain Mountsteven."

After a few minutes silence, Mr. Cameron added:

"You need say no more; leave me now, and I will decide how to act."

Wildey was forced to withdraw, and whilst he left Mr. Cameron in an agitated and uncomfortable frame of mind, he took away within his own breast, feelings still more excited and uneasy.

Long after he was gone, Mr. Cameron continued to pace up and down, in a state of nervous irritation; divided between trust and mistrust, jealousy and confidence; regret for the past and fear for the future. It was very painful to him to think ill of any one whom he had loved and trusted, as he had done James Wildey; and if he was attempting to deceive in one instance, why not in all within his power? if he was unworthy of confidence, who could merit it? where should he look for faith and integrity? But, on the other hand, it would be infinitely more painful to doubt the fidelity of his wife; to imagine her capable of hypocrisy was impossible, and though she was frank and rather unreserved, to suspect her of wilful levity was impossible. He loved her

sincerely, and thought her little short of perfection. The carelessness, or petulance, which sometimes wounded him, had a charm which more than atoned for the pain; and he firmly believed her incapable of a deliberate unkindness, being far more ready to attribute any seeming fault to his own absurd sensitiveness, than to any error of hers.

Could he then allow of suspicions injurious to her character, or take measures which might throw a shade over her prudence? No, never.

And yet, thought he, perhaps, in her innocence, she was really treading in a path of danger, and it depended on him to stretch out a hand to guide her aright. It was his duty to protect her, and if he did foresee dangers which she did not suspect, it was owing to his superior years, and better acquaintance with the world, not to any unreasonable jealousy of temper on his part. He could not bear to vex her with grave lectures, or suggestive hints; she should not know he was uneasy, but he would quietly take measures to lessen her intercourse

with the suspected lover, and so break it off gradually, without exciting remark.

For this purpose, he immediately gave private orders that Captain Mountsteven should not be admitted when he called, as he was much in the habit of doing, of an afternoon; and he considered this measure as one highly likely to conduce to his domestic peace.

Well-intentioned as he was, I believe Mr. Cameron to have been quite wrong in this step; in wishing to spare his wife's feeling, he was guilty of injustice towards her. Perfect confidence is the right of both husband and wife, and where it has not been forfeited by misconduct, cannot be fairly or justly withheld.

About the middle of the day, May came down stairs, looking weary and worn out; her last night's agitation had given her a violent head-ache, and she felt otherwise ill, uncomfortable, and unequal to exertion.

He made her lie down on the sofa, lowered the blinds to save her from the glare of light, hunted all about the room for the softest cushion for her head, and then sitting down by

her side, began to bathe her temples with eau-de-Cologne. She lay quite still for some time, allowing him to do so, with her eyes closed, and taking no notice of him; but at length she suddenly raised her hand, and clasping his, with which he was gently touching her forehead, she put it to her lips, whilst opening her eyes, on the lashes of which tears were standing, she looked earnestly at him as she said, in a trembling voice:

"You are very, very kind, Mr. Cameron—very good to me! I will never—no, never go into society without you again—never!"

The bright tears ran over her eyelids, and followed one another down her cheeks.

A flush of pleasure passed over her husband's face as she spoke; whether it was the pressure of her lips on his hand, or the announcement of this new resolution which occasioned it, did not exactly appear.

"I think, my dear girl," said he, retaining her hand, "if you were to stay at home with me, for a few evenings, it would do you good. You are harrassed and worn out with dissipation; you will take a little rest now, for your

own sake, I am sure, May; but do not fancy I ask it for my own pleasure, otherwise than as it is dependent on your health and comfort."

"Oh, yes," replied May, who felt depressed, nervous, uneasy, she knew not why, "I will stay at home to-night, to-morrow, any time you like; I feel as if I should never care for another party again. But then you must promise me we shall be quite alone; no one must disturb our quiet—remember, not one on any pretence!" and the colour mounted into her cheeks, as she thought of her cousin, whom she was so anxious to exclude.

"Agreed," answered he, quietly, "let us have three evenings' peace, when not even Wildey shall disturb us; it will be long since we have enjoyed such a luxury, May!"

"And I suspect," said May, smiling a little "you will be heartily tired of it, by the time our *tête-à-tête* is ended; you will be glad to seek some change, and thankful to every visitor who will enliven our fireside."

"Ah, well, we shall see. What will you do this afternoon?"

"Lie here—I cannot stir; light and motion are alike painful to my head."

And so she did for several hours; whilst he sat by her, sometimes reading aloud in a fashionable novel for her amusement, and when under the influence of this soporific she dropped asleep, reverting to a pamphlet on the state of the colonial trade, for his own private diversion; a process by which, unfortunately, Lord G—— of the Library became strangely confused with Lord G—— of the Cabinet; the dilemmas of the heroine were somehow confounded with the dissensions and difficulties of the Cape Colony, and in his bewilderment he could not remember which was the self-willed, obstinate, arbitrary man, the tyrant of the novel, or the Minister of State.

May was somewhat recovered the next day, and felt equal to the exertion of taking a drive; but the secret wish to avoid Lord Marcus, Captain Mountsteven, and above all, James Wildey, induced her to drive out into the country instead of the park; and by this prudent step, she not only avoided the objects of her dread, but enjoyed the restorative benefits of fresh air and wholesome exercise.

That Captain Mountsteven's card to inquire for her was all that she saw of him the first day of her seclusion, did not surprise her, as she had given orders to admit no visitors; and the next day also, there was nothing astonishing that they had no further intercourse, as he called whilst they were out. May was glad of this; she did not want to see him just then. When they did meet, her proud defiance of Wildey always inclined her to do or say something which was better left undone. It was easier and less humiliating to avoid him entirely, than to change the style of their intercourse on meeting. She had also resigned the Duchess's ball; and it was entirely on this account.

Numerous were the inquiries made after Mrs. Cameron, when her absence from this ball, on the plea of indisposition, became known to her dear friends in society. But for two days she resolutely saw none, and as the third day was Sunday, when she had never been in the habit of receiving visitors, she continued to lie *perdue* in her own house, a slight relapse on Sunday morning inducing her husband to press

her to remain at home instead of going to Church.

So sudden and extraordinary a secession from the world, excited considerable surprise and gossip between such of her acquaintance as liked to take cognisance of their neighbours' affairs. Among these was Lady Anne, who was doubly interested on the occasion, first, by her own curiosity, and secondly, by the wishes of Captain Mountsteven, to know why he was forbidden the house, and where Mrs. Cameron daily went, since he learned that she had twice driven out, though nobody had met her in public.

To investigate this matter, Lady Anne called late on Tuesday afternoon, having ascertained that Mrs. Cameron drove out quite early, and usually returned about three or four. Her ladyship was admitted, and found the husband and wife together, without other company.

She came, overflowing with condolences to May on her absence from the most brilliant *réunion* of the season; how provoking, tormenting, irritating, must have been indisposition

on such an occasion? How much she had lost from her absence, she would never, never know, nor how much her friends had lost from this same unfortunate cause. She had been regretted, pitied, sighed for beyond conception of either man or woman; and, indeed, it was generally agreed by all her acquaintance, that the only thing wanting to complete the *fête*, and render it perfection, was the presence of the beautiful Mrs. Cameron, who would have been the queen of the evening.

To all this, May replied with a light laugh, and a hope that her friends might have nothing worse to bear, or the Duchess no greater *contre-temps* in her plans and parties, than the absence of herself had been; and then she thought they might fairly be considered as happy people. "But," inquired she, "who was there?"

To run though a list of the principal company took up about five minutes, and it terminated with the names of what Lady Anne called a whole host of Mrs. Cameron's adorers, among whom her own cousin Valentine occupied a prominent place. "And he, poor

fellow," continued her ladyship, looking attentively and sharply, first at May, and then at her husband, "is quite in despair at being exiled from your house. When shall you be able to see him again, or is he quite interdicted?"

May wished she could have kept her countenance more unchanged under the scrutiny of Lady Anne's quick eyes; but there was something in her tone which discomposed her, and the remembrance of all that was connected with this name did not tend to lessen her confusion. As to Mr. Cameron, he was too intent on watching his wife's face, to discover that his own was a subject of Lady Anne's attention. Engrossed by his own feelings, he did not at the moment notice her looks, or observe the intonation of her voice.

After a little hesitation, May answered that as Captain Mountsteven had called twice whilst she was out, it was not very surprising that he had not been admitted.

"Oh, if that is all, of course there is nothing in it, but—" and here her ladyship stopped abruptly, as if there were at least a whole volume of circumstances and conjectures re-

tained within her own mind, and condemned to perpetual oblivion when she closed her lips.

"And what did you suppose there would be in it, Lady Anne?" demanded May, coolly "high treason, or some new chemical discovery, or what?"

"Why, my dear, such a very sudden change, you know, excited attention in certain person who noticed it, and certain things were whispered in certain directions; and those sort of conjectures, you know, are so unpleasant if circulated unchecked, that, in justice to you, I thought I would just hint at the affair, because, you see—but I need not say more now, you understand, I am sure?"

"On the contrary, I am completely mystified why should anything be whispered, said, or circulated, either pleasant or unpleasant, because a gentleman happens to call when I am driving out?"

"Valentine, you know, called several times in the last three days, when you were at home, Mrs. Cameron, as he was anxious to see you, but you know best, probably, why he was not admitted as formerly."

"Indeed, it is the first I have ever heard of it; were you aware of this, Mr. Cameron?" turning with a look of considerable surprise to her husband.

She saw instantly by his look that it was his doing, and so did Lady Anne; there was a glance of something like triumph in her ladyship's eyes which provoked May; and an air of confusion about Mr. Cameron, which she was sorry any one else should witness.

"I think, my dear Mr. Cameron," said she in a tone of gentle remonstrance, "you hardly acted with your usual judgment in giving an order to exclude Captain Mountsteven, without telling me; it was likely to lead to mistakes and misunderstanding; and you could not imagine I should be inclined to dispute it. I like him myself, and think him agreeable, but if you consider his visits tiresome and too frequent, why not tell me of it, and I am sure I would relinquish them."

"La! my dear Mr. Cameron," laughed Lady Anne, "what a good obedient wife you have; how can you be jealous of my cousin, or mistrust your lady, when she talks so prettily?"

The husband's face flushed all over, and May's cheeks crimsoned at these words. She rose, and crossing the room to where he was sitting, laid her hand on his arm, and said in an earnest voice:

"Dear Mr. Cameron, it surely was no such feeling that induced you to act thus; can you be so unjust to me? without remonstrance or warning from you—without so much as a hint that you wished my associates other than they were, you surely could not entertain ideas mistrustful to me, and derogatory to your—self."

"I never mistrusted you, my love," said he, taking her hand in both of his, "I knew there was no reason for it; you are sometimes rash and thoughtless, May, but I know your heart, and could not wrong you so. I said it was a falsehood, and I say so still, and it vexes me to think that I ever listened to it."

May's eyes flashed, and she exclaimed indignantly:

"And who dared to insinuate slanders of me?"

"It was not exactly that, either, May;

Wildey said *you* were perfectly innocent, and that the fault was another's. He said that unpleasant reports were circulated, and you see Lady Anne says so, too: but he particularly wished you not to be annoyed on the topic."

May stood for a moment in silence; the pressure of her lips, and the frown on her brow, shewed that unpleasant thoughts were working in her mind; then she walked back again to her seat, and observed with a forced smile to Lady Anne:

"Am I not fortunate to have so kind a cousin? he not only manages my husband's business, but extends his cares to my domestic arrangements, and takes my visitors, and my reputation, alike under his patronage?"

"And so it was this Mr. Wildey who objected to my cousin's visits," said Lady Anne, "and put ideas into Mr. Cameron's head, which I am sure Valentine never dreamt of. It was very wrong of him to meddle in that way. How glad I am I called this afternoon, and so brought about this explanation; or who knows but that Mr. Cameron might have gone on being jealous to the end of his life, and

become a second Bluebeard in his anger? How luckily things turn out!"

May looked excessively annoyed, and so did Mr. Cameron at this speech; they wanted not Lady Anne to make comments on their domestic happiness; and to have her boasting of her interference having effected an explanation, was as bad as to suppose Wildey rejoicing in having produced a misunderstanding. May felt she had been imprudent in speaking on the impulse of the moment; she wished she had waited until after her ladyship's departure before asking her husband his reasons for his conduct. It would have been much better to have allowed her to go away in real ignorance of the circumstances, than to have suffered her to perceive all the facts as she had done.

"When shall I learn prudence and discretion," thought she with a sigh, "when shall I learn to hold my tongue at proper times? I am sure the bump of cautiousness can have no place in my head."

"And now, my dear," continued Lady Anne, "you really must not shut yourself up, for your own sake, and your husband's, or else you

know it will get about that he is a horrid jealous tyrant, which will not be agreeable to your feelings."

"I do not intend to shut myself up, Lady Anne. I stayed at home because I was ill; but I am better now."

"Well, then, come to my conversazione the day after to-morrow?"

"Wednesday—thank you, but we have an engagement; we are going to Mrs. Gambier's concert. Mr. Cameron is so fond of music, that I believe the only dissipation he thoroughly likes is a concert."

She looked smilingly at her husband as she said this, and he assented quietly, but apparently very well pleased.

"Ah, well! then next week I shall hope for the pleasure," said Lady Anne, rising, "and now I must end a most preposterously long visit; but, you know, it has been so interesting and gratifying to me, that I hope you will excuse it, and so I bid you heartily farewell."

And with the most cordial hand-shakings, and most affectionate smiles, her ladyship took her departure from Hyde Park Gardens.

CHAPTER V.

HORATIO. She speaks things in doubt,
That carry but half sense; her speech is nothing—
Yet as her winks and nods and gestures yield them,
Indeed would make one think, there might be though
Though nothing sure—

HAMLET.

LADY ANNE found her cousin waiting for her in her own drawing-room. He came there by appointment to learn the result of her visit.

"Well, Valentine," cried she laughing, as she threw herself down on the sofa, "I have done your bidding, and found out all about the reason of your being excluded from that house. It is not Mr. Cameron's wish, though he cannot con-

ceal, poor man, that he is dying of jealousy; good, honest, sober soul, his wife governs him with her little finger, I can see that, and it is not Mrs. Cameron's doing—very far from it; indeed, she professes with the most charming innocence in the world, utter ignorance that you had called, and surprise that any one should notice your attentions to her. It is all the doing of that interfering cousin—that clerk—that Wildey—who is always haunting her, and who affects to consider you as a dreadfully dangerous fellow, who must be excluded from the society of such a pretty angel as Mrs. Cameron."

Captain Mountsteven whistled, and walked away to the window.

"You do not really mean any harm, Valentine, do you?" continued Lady Anne, turning over some cards as she spoke, "because you know I could not in conscience take any part in the affair if there were really anything wrong in it. A little harmless flirtation or so is nothing, but if you will not assure me, upon your honour that you have no bad designs, *I* shall consider it

necessary to exclude you myself, and know nothing about your secrets for the future."

"I cannot imagine why you should think I do mean any harm," exclaimed he impatiently, and returning to his seat as he spoke, "I suppose I may talk to a pleasant woman without having any worse design in my head than amusing myself; and as to Mrs. Cameron, I believe her to be very much attached to her husband; whatever I may once have thought, I certainly respect them both now."

"Oh, there is no doubt whatever, but that they are immensely attached," cried Lady Anne, laughing again as she lay back in her eider-down cushions, "it was quite pathetic to see her this morning appealing to him so earnestly, because he suspected her of liking you best. Upon my word, it was quite moving, and I was puzzled to conceal my laughter."

"I wonder you could see anything to laugh at in that," replied her cousin coldly, and somewhat scornfully.

"But, after all, why are you so piqued at not seeing Mrs. Cameron, Valentine; or at her

aking, or her husband taking a simple and prudent precaution with regard to you and your visits."

"Because it is quite unnecessary," replied Mountsteven, hastily, "if they had acted on their own views of the case, I should not have minded; but to have that rascally clerk interfering—a man, who, were he not Mrs. Cameron's cousin, I would take the first opportunity of kicking down stairs, to have him presuming to dictate either to her or to me, provokes me beyond endurance."

"I wonder she allows it; did it ever strike you that she is very fond of her cousin?"

"Fond of him—how do you mean?" exclaimed the young soldier.

"Why it's not my idea; but Lord Marcus told me; he knew her before she was married it appears, and he told me in strict confidence, that there was an old attachment subsisting between these two; that he got her to marry old Mr. Cameron for the sake of his money, and that they were looking forward to future years—you understand—Lord Marcus is very amusing about it, he calls them May and December, rather a good idea—don't you think so? Certainly the

disparity of years puts any affection out of the question. I dare say, however, it is only a prudent thing to provide so well for one's self. I don't think I would have done it at any time, my foible unfortunately was too much romance, and you know poor dear Colonel Stanforth was never able to say, *I* married for money. However, as to Mrs. Cameron, you know, this same cousin now mounts guard over her, and has great influence, extraordinary influence over her —; and the husband, too, I apprehend is quite under his thumb, as the saying is, so unless you get his leave for visiting, you will continue to find yourself on the wrong side of the door. I learned all this from Lord Marcus, you know.

"Oh!" was the only answer to her long speech.

"Well, now really, you take it very coolly, Valentine," pursued Lady Anne, "but I suppose you do not care much whether you visit her or not. May and December—is not that a good name? Lord Marcus told me all this in strict confidence, so of course you will be careful how you repeat it, you know I do not wish to make mischief, and least said is soonest mended."

"Oh yes, of course, of course."

"And you don't care, Valentine? why Lord Marcus thought, (but he desired me not to say so on any account, which is the reason I did not mention it before,) but he thought you would be most particularly vexed at all this, and angry with that Wildey. In fact, he thought you were very much in love with the pretty May, and that you would be dreadfully jealous of this provoking cousin."

"You seem to have made the state of my feelings and affections the matter for considerable discussion with Lord Marcus, I think, Lady Anne."

"We had a little chat about it last night, certainly; he is such an amusing funny man, he makes one laugh in spite of oneself. But I am glad you do not really care."

"I should care very little whether I visited Mrs. Cameron or not, provided it were settled either way, of her own free will. But I am not going to be dictated to, by a clerk in her husband's counting-house; a pretty thing indeed to have to submit to the whims of a shabby, low,

rascal like him. I dare say—I think I [redacted] myself giving way to his sordid jealousy. As [redacted] Mrs. Cameron caring for him a single atom, I don't believe it."

"Indeed, Lord Marcus was very positive of that!"

"He can know very little about it, as he has no intercourse with her; my own opinion is that she positively hates him. She shudders when he comes near; turns pale when he looks at her, avoids him in every possible way, and though she never actually owned it to me, I am certain that she absolutely loathes him."

"Well, what do you mean to do then, how shall you act to re-establish the intercourse with the house."

"Oh, I do not think I shall do anything, or act in any way in particular. I shall let things take their chance. We must meet again soon, and we shall be obliged to behave in some way, and then I shall not be long finding out what her inclinations are. It does not matter to me really, whether I drop their acquaintance or not; it depends on her wishes."

hether it was from malice or thoughtless-
from love of mischief-making, love of Lore
ıs, or love of hearing herself talk, is not
n, and probably never will be; but at all
s, Lady Anne repeated a great deal of this
rsation to Lord Marcus himself, who
d to have particular reasons for interesting
lf in the affair, and was extremely desirous
aking himself well acquainted with the
gs of the several individuals concerned.
r own share in the dialogue indeed she
ted to considerable alterations and varia-
which perhaps she looked on as improve-
, so that her account might be considered
as relating what she thought she ought to
said, than what she actually uttered on the
on. However, his lordship appeared to be
tly well satisfied with so much as she did
, and made himself very amusing at

vivacious, and Lady Anne's enjoyment of it so evident, that it attracted the attention of more than one of the parties present, and was received with equal satisfacton by all. The beautiful Mrs. Cameron had a large circle of dear friends who entered with immense zest into the joke, and who whilst declaring it was a great shame of that naughty Lord Marcus, and just like him, made no scruple of repeating the nick-name to their particular friends, with the condition that it was to go no further—the consequence of which was, that before many days there were few who knew her by name who were not ready to whisper if she appeared, "May and December, you know—oh yes, Lord Marcus' invention, capital is it not?"

In the meantime, May Cameron—without in the least suspecting the manner in which Lord Marcus repaid her scorn by ridicule, and tried to be revenged for her slights in a way which she should feel—continued on very good terms with her husband, although by a sort of tacit agreement, the recent coversation with Lady Anne was not mentioned between them. They spent the evening without company, and May

exerted herself to amuse Mr. Cameron both by conversation and music, as if to show him, how much she valued his comfort, and how little he need trouble himself with jealousy of any other individual. Nothing could seem happier or more cheerful than he was during the evening. Wildey's disagreeable suspicions, and his own equally unpleasant doubts of Wildey, his anxieties regarding business-affairs, and in short, everything which could in the least worry or annoy him, were for the present laid aside, and he felt almost for the first time the calm of domestic enjoyment.

They breakfasted together the next morning, and he appeared equally happy and comfortable: as May was now quite well, he proposed to go down to the city immediately after breakfast, and have a little look into the counting-house: there were affairs which required his attention, and really he had given them very little lately; he was afraid things were rather disordered, he wished much to see how matters stood. He supposed May could spare him.

She did not make any objection, and yet she seemed to hesitate. There was something she

wanted to say, which she did not quite like to utter: at last, she asked how it happened that affairs got wrong, when Wildey was, or ought to be, there, to keep them right; surely, he might be trusted!

She wished to say more, it was on her tongue to insinuate something distrustful of him; but she dared not—she remembered her promise, a promise which bound her not to interfere with his fortunes, and she doubted whether she could consistently with this promise speak her mind. Mr. Cameron did not answer exactly, or take any notice of the doubt implied in her remark; a shade of uneasiness came over his face, as he replied that he would be back soon after luncheon and drive out with her. He then went away and left May to sit by herself and try to think.

At that moment, when in the confusion of her ideas, and the contradictory nature of her feelings she could scarcely tell what she wished, feared or fancied, what she ought to do, and how she had better act, she earnestly longed for a friend to speak to of her sorrows, and consult as to her conduct. She was very unhappy; and

had a presentiment that some dreadful event
s hanging over her head, and threatening to
ke still further inroads on her peace of mind.
hat was its nature, or what evil it would
ng, she could as little tell as how to escape
n it. Its origin she believed to be in her
sin; that odious cousin, whose haunting
sence had been her torment ever since her
val in London. His sinister expression
en angry, an expression which so completely
red his handsome face, and made it fearful
her, was ever before her eyes; with a threat-
ng air, it seemed to dare her to emancipate
self from those fetters which he had cast
und her; she felt herself his slave and his
tim; he came between her husband and her-
, and taught him suspicion and mistrust;
. Cameron could not be otherwise than kind,
; he had ceased to be open; he had doubted
prudence, and avoided her confidence. The
ne dark frowning face came also between her-
and her conscience, alarming her by its evil
gestions, by the angry feelings it stirred up;
king her conscience uneasy and rebellious.
It would have been easy indeed to have

adjusted her doubts, and settled her course of action, could she have gone straight to her husband and told him all; had she dared to explain all that had passed between her cousin and herself, and to own the subjection in which he held her; but the consequences of such a step, would have been Wildey's immediate ruin, and this she felt, her fatal promise forbade.

Oh, why had she bound herself; why had she sold herself to this man; was it not that fatal ambition to be rich, which had prompted her; was it not to win the position she now held, to be the wife of a wealthy man, surrounded by luxury and magnificence, and with the means of heaping up around her more and more of those useless trifles which only dazzle at a distance, and please but in anticipation! Yes, for this she had rushed madly on the dangers, the sorrows, the difficulties of a mercenary marriage; for the possession of these baubles, she had given up her freedom, she had despised the advice of a true friend, she had fettered herself for life.

And what had she gained by her bargain? It was true, so far as her husband was concerned,

she had been far more fortunate than she had any right to expect: marrying as she did for money, she might have found herself the wife of a man who inspired dislike, or contempt. The contrary was the case; Mr. Cameron's thorough goodness of heart, his generosity and unvarying kindness, had won her warmest regard; and this regard grew stronger every day. But the warmth of her affection seemed to make her difficulties greater; she could not bear to lose his esteem, nor could she endure voluntarily to give him pain. To have informed him of what had passed between her and Wildey, previously to her marriage, would of course have hurt him deeply: she could fancy the wound it would cause, she could imagine the pained look with which he would receive such information. No, she could not allow him to learn a fact so mortifying, if it was in her power to conceal it.

But what had James told him about Captain Mountsteven; what new plot was this of her cousin to vex and control her; why was he thus angry at what was no concern of his; was it jealousy which prompted him; was the affection he had once professed, not yet extinguished?

If this was so, here again was retribution for her own misdeeds; she had voluntarily created the attachment which now, perhaps, made her miserable. Without his jealous interference, she was certain her husband would never have thought ill of her; and that he must have entertained a bad opinion of her conduct, she concluded, from his forbidding Captain Mountsteven the house, without consulting her on the subject. And had she been guilty of no levity; could her conscience acquit her there, too? not quite; she was not perhaps so bad as James supposed, but she knew that she had not always been prudent; that she had trespassed far on the kindness and forbearance of her husband. Look which way she would, she saw nothing but difficulty, self-reproach, and loss of esteem before her; she knew not what to do, and she had no one to consult. She had been compelled to sacrifice her best friend; that was one of the consequences of her ill-judged marriage; she had lost Grace Dunsford, and she was now ashamed to seek her, ashamed to let her know how true her words had proved.

Whilst May Cameron sat sadly ruminating

on her present entanglement, feeling too much perplexed to know what to do to escape from it, her husband was driving down to the city, with an uncomfortable oppression on his mind also.

It was not so much his wife that distressed him; he was never long with her without feeling satisfied as to her integrity, it was an uncertain, unsettled doubt about his adviser, Wildey. He could not bear to seem suspicious, or to hurt a person's feelings; especially one in whom he had been accustomed to confide; he kept on thinking how dreadful it would be, if Wildey whilst innocent, discovered that he had been suspected; how he would be grieved and pained; and then even if he were guilty, how terrible it would be if he were found out; how deeply in such a case he, Mr. Cameron, would feel the shock! He would rather be cheated almost to any extent than have to prove a man like Wildey dishonest. Yet there were things which he could not quite understand; accounts which required to be accounted for themselves; a falling-off in the profits of the concern, which vexed him to the heart. Something like an ex-

planation must be obtained, and he must make out what his clerk had been about for some time back.

With these intentions, Wildey was summoned to the conference; but with no such intentions did he come, and his subtilty was more than a match for his companion's intellect. After more than an hour's consultation, they parted, and during that time, scarcely ten minutes had been given to the discussion of business. The clerk had had the adroitness to turn the conversation immediately upon his cousin's affairs, and again to insinuate unwelcome doubts in the husband's mind. He hinted at the notoriety of the flirtation, and the small chance there was, that it would really be given up, unless May were removed to a safe distance. Prentending to condole with Mr. Cameron on this unfortunate change of affairs, he added to his uneasiness by every word he spoke nothing grieved him so deeply as to see his respected patron, his friend, he hoped he might call him, made a mark for public contempt and ridicule; he told him, with every expression of concern, but he thought it right to tell him, it was only to save him from

learning it in a more painful way, of the name which Lord Marcus had bestowed on them: he made Mr. Cameron believe, that even at that time this name was in general circulation amongst their acquaintance, and that everywhere as a husband, he had become an object of scorn.

The merchant's weak point, was a susceptibility to ridicule; and he was in great consternation at the notion that he was suddenly become the butt of all the world; he felt inclined at once to run away, and hide himself from public scorn, in some remote corner of the country; he began to think that his marriage had been a rash, ill-advised step, and that the consequences could not fail to be other than shame and disgrace.

In these ideas, his clerk artfully encouraged him, omitting nothing which could increase his discomfort, or in any way, add to his unhappiness; and all the time, professing such a degree of distress at vexing him, so much respect, affection, and esteem; such anxiety for his cousin's honour and character, such a wish that

all should be hushed up, or quietly passed over, and such a dread lest *he* should appear in the odious character of a mischief-maker, that Mr. Cameron could not mistrust him, or avoid yielding to his guidance.

Wildey's great object was to persuade him to remove from town, and to carry his wife into seclusion for the present; he had several motives for this project. To separate May from Mountsteven was one of these; to shew his power over her was, perhaps, another; but a more pressing one than either, was to send Mr. Cameron himself from the counting-house, where his presence was undesirable; to prevent inspection into certain proceedings of his own; and to secure his present mode of life from all supervision and restraint. There were private speculations of his own, principally in railroads, which he was very desirous to keep from the merchant's knowledge; and believing, as he did, that the gains which he had lately made in this species of gambling, might have been doubled or trebled, had he been able to venture more boldly, he was determined to do his utmost to

remove Mr. Cameron to a distance, that he might carry on his unjustifiable plans with more freedom, and less danger of detection.

His pleasures were becoming every week more expensive, and requiring a larger income; to support his claim to the character of a man of fashion and fortune, he had indulged in very extravagant habits, and set up an establishment of a nature, which is as ruinous to a man's purse as it is contrary to morals and propriety.

He was very successful in filling Mr. Cameron's mind with uneasiness, doubts, and nervous fears, but he could not succeed in making him angry with his wife; he was very sorry, if she really had been imprudent, and distressed at all he heard; but he could not believe she meant any harm, nor that she really was capable of joining in ridiculing himself, or laughing at his age and manners. No, May was always good to him, and though no doubt, it was unreasonable to suppose she loved him, he was sure she was too generous, and he might say, too sensible and well-principled to be capable of harbouring an unkind thought. Other people might laugh, perhaps; he supposed

they did, as Wildey said so, and, perhaps, it was natural they should; it had been a foolish fancy on his part, to expect a young and beautiful woman, like May, to suit an old man, or agree to his tastes and habits; it had been an unwise action, and naturally brought evils and inconveniences in its train; well then, so be it—the folly had been his, the penance must be his also; he must bear it as well as he could. If his wife's disposition was unsuitable, and her pleasures the reverse of what his would be, he must make the more allowances for her, and exercise the greater forbearance, that was his only resource; it would not mend matters to torment her with jealous doubts, nor make himself happier to yield to irritation, or to act the part of a jailer; it was not her fault that she was admired, in fact, he liked it; and if he himself was ridiculed—here he winced considerably, but presently went on again with tolerable boldness—why, he must try and bear that, too.

Wildey was disappointed by his philosophy, but he did not lose all hope, he saw that it cost an effort to declare this calm indifference to public opinion, and he trusted that repetition

on his part of all that was to be feared, and perpetual recurrence to the unpleasant topic would greatly work upon Mr. Cameron's nervous fear of ridicule, and in time effect all he could desire.

At all events, it had answered for the present; and Mr. Cameron drove home without having entered into any of those investigations, the result of which Wildey so much dreaded. When May heard her husband's carriage at the door, she dispersed the tears that were hanging on her eye-lashes, arranged her hair, and seated herself at her embroidery-frame, anxious that he should not perceive traces of the emotion to which she had been giving way; and as he did not immediately come-up stairs, she had time enough to resume her ordinary air of content.

A glance at Mr. Cameron's face as he entered, made her fear that matters had not gone on prosperously in the city; he looked pale, dejected, and uneasy; and she instantly inquired whether anything was the matter. As he answered in the negative, she only concluded that he did not mean to tell her, for,

she was too well used to read his countenance to doubt that there really was some secret source of dissatisfaction. He did not appear inclined to talk, and absolutely refused to eat, so she took her luncheon alone, and on her return, she found him deeply engaged with the pages of a pamphlet.

"You promised to drive with me, Mr. Cameron," said she coming behind him, and stooping over his shoulder to look in his face with a smile, "will you come, or do you repent?"

He put back the beautiful glossy curls which fell over her face, and looking at her with an expression half-sorrowful, half tender, he did not answer.

"Well," said she, laughing at his silent inspection, "what are you considering about; are you doubting whether I am pretty enough to go with you; I promise you I will put on my best looks, and loveliest bonnet, if you will come. Do not be afraid of my not being smart enough."

"Oh, May, you are only too lovely."

"Well, now really that is not my fault,

however, it may be my misfortune. For anything I know to the contrary, I am just as you married me, and if you think I am grown prettier since then, tell me what I shall do to cure it; and I will try."

"You are not a bit too pretty for yourself, but for me; too pretty to be the companion of an old, wrinkled, wintry-looking being like myself, May; you, with all your summer-bloom upon your bright cheek; I am sure you must be ashamed of owning me as your husband." And his eyes grew more sorrowful as he spoke thus to her.

May stepped round his chair, and stood in front of him.

"If I could be ashamed of you, my generous, kind-hearted husband, tender, forbearing, unselfish, as you have always been to me, if I could be so ungrateful, oh, I should be a wretch indeed!" The tone of her voice, her earnest eyes, and the pressure of her hands, as she clasped them together, shewed the energy of her feelings. "What have I said or done, to make you think so ill of me," she continued, suddenly throwing her arms round his neck,

and hiding her face on his shoulder, "I am often giddy and foolish, vain and idle, but not so bad as that; who has put such thoughts into that dear kind heart of yours, which never of itself could suggest a harsh thing; who has tried to make you think ill of your wife?"

"My dearest child," said he, tenderly kissing her again and again, "I don't think ill of you, I could not; if all the world were to try and make me. But, May, my darling, I can see and feel that our years are unsuitable, that it is not in nature for you to love a grave old man with the sort of tenderness that foolish old man feels for you; and that you have discovered already that our marriage was a mistake, which now unfortunately cannot be rectified."

"Oh, what a reproach!" cried May, "can you really suppose that I entertained such an idea, for half a moment; never, never—I must have behaved ill, indeed, if you can think so, but I never meant it."

"No, my love; I would not reproach you, you cannot help the feeling; I have seen that you were not happy with the greatest concern, and I would do anything to make you so; I

have seen the tears in your eyelids, when you were asleep, and I have heard you sigh in a way that went to my heart. But, May, it cannot be helped now, and the only thing which remains for us, is to try to be happy as we are. We may make our situation worse by impatience, or repining; much worse, darling, if we were to give way to unlawful feelings, unsanctified passions; we have much we may still lose, and losing which would be worse than all. Honour, reputation, virtue, these we have to lose or to keep, according as we value and care for them. Do not let us forfeit these."

"How good you are, Mr. Cameron," said she softly, and wiping away the tears which stood in her eyes, "how little I deserve your goodness! If you only knew how your kind words pain me, I think you would scold a little, to relieve my feelings," half smiling as she spoke; "but now I am going to be serious, and you must believe every word I say; I have sometimes regretted that I was not more worthy of you, but never for my own sake that I was your wife; if you have seen tears, or

heard sighs, lay them to some other account; they were for trifling vexations, foolish fancies which concerned myself alone, vanities which have not long dwelt on my mind:" she stopped, and hesitated again; a consciousness that these tokens of emotion had a source she dared not explain, embarrassed her, and she looked down, colouring and playing with her chain, unable to say more for some minutes. Then, recovering herself, she went on; "do not fear for your honour or my character! how dared he, James Wildey, insinuate a doubt to you, for I know it was he—you little know—" and then she stopped again; she longed to add something as to his motives, but she dared not, lest she should be tempted to reveal too much.

"He meant no harm, May; it was concern for you; and if he judged you hastily, you must forgive him for the motive. Let me say it for once, my love," looking away as he spoke, lest his eyes should increase her uneasiness; "you have been imprudent; you have given rise to whispers—I would not pain you for the world—I know your innocence, your ignorance of the misconstruction to which you exposed

yourself; do not think that I am uneasy, or that I speak from jealous suspicions; I need say no more; you will I am sure be more cautious for the future! But now, to put to sleep evil surmises, and allow slanders to die a natural death, shall I take you away; will you come into the country for a time; should you like to go down to Littlemere and see your uncle, or is there any other place you prefer visiting? The Continent—Paris—Italy—I do not wish to go abroad, but if you liked it, I would not hesitate, only choose!"

"Must I—ought I?" said she, hesitating.

"You had better; it would be better perhaps for both."

"Let us go, then; but we need not be in a hurry; we need not run away as if I were really guilty. I will be prudent, cautious—if I can—I know what you mean—you shall see that I wish to please you—dear, good husband that you are!"

"And now we shall never have to say more on this unpleasant topic, May."

"Well then, come out for a drive; the carriage has been waiting this half-hour."

They went accordingly, and to the park as in former times, and May received many congratulations on her recovery, and her return to the delights of society.

"You have been quite a hermit, Mrs. Cameron, for time beyond measure. I cannot reckon how long it is since I saw you. You are become a thing to be wondered at, and looked after, and speculated on, like a sea-serpent, or an eclipse."

Such were the greetings that met her.

"I was ill," was her reply, "and kept the house in consequence, nothing so very unheard of in such a proceeding."

But amongst the circle, as might be expected, appeared Valentine Mountsteven, who suddenly reined up his horse by the opposite side of the carriage, and leaning past Mr. Cameron, addressed her.

It required a good deal of self-command on her part to reply to his ordinary salutation in at all an ordinary way; she could scarcely keep her voice from trembling, and not at all prevent the colour from rising to her cheeks. She glanced at her husband as she held out her hand across him, but Mr. Cameron's look of

calm self-possession betrayed no conscious remembrance of what had occurred between them. He did not seem to be watching her, and addressed the Captain himself with great equanimity and good will. May felt obliged to him for this appearance of indifference, and she tried to speak and look as if there were nothing more on her mind in meeting Mountsteven than in seeing any other ordinary acquaintance. She wished to be calm and friendly, but her wishes were counteracted by her feelings. She was flurried and nervous, wondering what her husband would think, what Mountsteven would suppose, and whether any of her acquaintance still close to her would discover or guess the reason of her agitation.

The Captain looked grave and quiet, did not say much to her, but entered into conversation with her husband on political matters, so May relieved her feelings by turning again to another acquaintance; and presently she had a little knot of gentlemen gathered by the side of her carriage, all eagerly expressing their extreme satisfaction at meeting her again in health after

her late illness, whilst Captain Mountsteven maintained his position by Mr. Cameron, and talked as gravely of the corn trade, and the state of the colonies, as if he had been a brother merchant himself.

Presently May expressed a wish to walk a little; she had never dropped her country habit of taking exercise on foot, and she was very fond of sauntering along by the Serpentine, watching the crowd, or chatting with her acquaintance. They kept pretty much the same order in walking; she was leaning on her husband's arm, whilst Mountsteven continued to engross his attention. Here they again encountered Lord Marcus and her cousin, who appeared as if they had been searching for her. The latter silently pressed her hand, which she could not refuse to let him take, and contented himself for all other greeting, with fixing his eyes on her face, with a look which he wished to make tenderly reproachful, penitential, and affectionate. The former made the most graceful of bows, and in spite of her cold manner, placed himself by her side, and observed, that it gave him the sincerest

pleasure to see her abroad again, he had really feared that she intended to seclude herself until her own month came round.

There was something in the tone in which these words were uttered that caught the attention of most of the party. Mr. Cameron visibly winced at an allusion which instantly reminded him of an unpleasant idea; Wildey glanced with an air of intelligence at Lord Marcus, and then gave a sort of pitying, condoling look at the merchant; Captain Mountsteven looked gravely at Lord Marcus, and very contemptuously at the clerk, who catching his eye, crimsoned, and tried to seem scornful in his turn. May was perhaps the only one of the group who attached no particular meaning to the sentence, and only thought that Lord Marcus was disagreeable.

"One would think, however, from the soft mildness of this day," continued he, "that it was one peculiarly your own; a May-day of olden times; it is so sweet, so bright, so full of rapid changes, each lovelier than the other; so peculiarly bewitching; the very May of the poets, the ideal of all that is captivating, soft,

enchanting—the birth-day of the loves and graces, of sweet thoughts and kindly fancies."

May did not make any reply to this rhapsody, and Lord Marcus, added immediately afterwards, with still more emphasis, "Happy those, who like Mr. Cameron, can secure to themselves a May the whole year round!"

"If all this is intended as a compliment to my name," said she, suddenly turning towards him, "I beg leave to say that I consider all such allusions as impertinent and uncalled for."

She spoke without pausing to consider whether what she said was exactly courteous or agreeable, she saw her husband looked annoyed at Lord Marcus' speech, and she was annoyed herself, and did not hesitate to express that annoyance at once.

"I am unfortunate," he replied, "if I offend, where I intended to please, most unfortunate. Wildey, you must interfere between us; shield me from your cousin's wrath—step into my place; she will not be angry with you, I am certain."

And he moved to the other side of Wildey as he spoke, so that James was next his cousin.

"May," said Mr. Cameron at this moment,

"I want to speak to that gentleman sitting on the bench under the tree there; he is an old city acquaintance of mine; you can pursue your walk, if you do not mind, whilst I stay with him."

"Why can I not stay with you?" asked she.

"Oh, it is business I have to speak of—you would not like it—come when you are tired."

Before he separated from them, Lord Marcus observed suddenly, as if referring to what he had previously said,

"After all, which do you suppose may truly be said to rule the year, May or December; in spite of all the poets have said or sung, I have my doubts which is paramount."

Mr. Cameron walked hastily away; Wildey laughed outright, but Mountsteven replied, "I think you ought to be ashamed of expressing such a heterodox doubt, my Lord, considering all things."

"You have probably better means of information than I have, Mountsteven," returned he, carelessly.

"There are those who know better still near

you," glancing at Wildey as he spoke, "those who to their shame prefer a cloudy sky, whether in May or December—probably from their love of fishing in troubled waters."

Wildey bit his lip, and looked confused. May began to perceive that something more was meant in these words than she had at first supposed, something which Mountsteven seemed to consider impertinent.

"You are tired, Mrs. Cameron," said the soldier, "pray take my arm."

"Thank you, I am not in the least fatigued, and do not need it."

"Take my arm, May!" said her cousin, in an authoritative voice, and attempting as he spoke to draw her hand under his.

She drew it away, with a scornful air, and barely thanked him for the offer.

Lord Marcus laughed—a taunting contemptuous laugh—and said in a sort of under-tone, but still loud enough for them all to hear. "Unsuccessful candidate the second, a fair field and no favour."

No one answered, and presently he added,

"Wildey, what is the difference between

negative and positive electricity. Is not one attractive and the other repulsive?"

"Upon my word, I don't know my Lord."

"I thought your experience would have taught you by the repulse you just now met with, Wildey," continued he, laughing as if he thought it a capital joke.

"Mr. Wildey might have spared himself the infliction, with a little consideration," said Mountsteven, in a contemptuous tone, "it was not likely his services would be accepted when mine were just declined."

Mrs. Cameron suddenly paused in her walk.

"I am going back to Mr. Cameron," said she. "Good morning to you *all*," and with a bow she turned away from the three gentlemen, and quickly retraced her steps to her husband; as they had walked very slowly, they were not more than a hundred yards from the spot where he was sitting. What more passed between the gentlemen she did not know; she only saw Mountsteven turn away with a haughty and contemptuous air, and Lord Marcus and Wildey walk off in another direction.

She returned home rather disturbed in spirits, and talked all the way of the plan Mr. Cameron had suggested of visiting the Continent. They had an engagement out that evening to a small musical party, where, to May's great relief, they met neither of the gentlemen whose appearance always disturbed her peace, and the evening, though not very brilliant, was quiet and cheerful.

CHAPTER VI.

Romeo, the hate I bear thee can afford
No better term than this—thou art a villain!

ROMEO AND JULIET.

JAMES WILDEY was a clever and a cunning man; he was also a bold man in stratagems and manœuvres, speculations and business-matters; but he was not a brave man—he was a coward at heart. In cunning and skill, he had met with more than his match in Lord Marcus, and in unscrupulous boldness, he was left far behind by his lordship.

Lord Marcus was determined to make him quarrel with Mountsteven, and although Wildey tried hard to avoid it, he tried in vain.

At a dinner in Lord Marcus' own house, to which on a plea of effecting a reconciliation he had invited the rivals, and where he had only one other guest present, he contrived artfully to originate a dispute, an easy thing between parties already so much inclined to ill-will, and rather heated by wine. Lord Marcus had insinuated something which induced Wildey imprudently to boast of his influence over Mrs. Cameron and her husband, which Mountsteven with equal warmth and imprudence disputed. Their host, whilst pretending to interpose, only exasperated matters, and it ended after a sharp altercation, in the young soldier abruptly declaring that he would no longer sit at the same table with a man whom, if he were not honoured by being Lord Marcus' guest, he should not hesitate to denounce as a rogue and a villain, with which words he left the house.

The natural consequences followed; a demand for an apology the next morning was treated by Captain Mountsteven with scorn, and an appointment to meet early the ensuing day to settle the affair with pistols, was the only result at which their mutual friends could arrive.

Time, place, weapons, were all arranged for him, and Wildey, with all the horror of cowardice, meanness, and guilt, found himself involved in an affair, which might cost him his life if persisted in, or his character if given up.

It is not my place to moralize on the state of society which can make such arrangements necessary, or cause them to be received as things of course in civilized life.

Mr. Cameron had on this day gone to a great public meeting, which was to be held for some mixed commercial and charitable purposes at the Thatched House Tavern, and which was to conclude with a public dinner, expressly for the benefit of the charity.

May was just preparing to step into her carriage for her afternoon's drive, when her cousin suddenly pushed aside the footman, and seizing her arm with a degree of impetuosity that so surprised her, as to take away all thought of resistance, he hurried her back into the house, never stopping until he had closed the door of the *boudoir* upon them. Then he relaxed his hold upon her, and she, out of breath with

the rapidity of his movements, and really frightened by his looks and ways, sank trembling into a chair, and silently watched him. He folded his arms, and stood before her, his gloomy eyes bent on the carpet, and his whole countenance expressive of strange agitation.

Finding, however, that he did not speak, she could bear the suspense no longer, and starting up she went up to him, and laying both hands on his arm, asked in a trembling, timid voice, what was the matter?

He took her hands in his, and looking earnestly, almost fiercely, in her face, he said,

"Tell me, May, and tell me the truth—do you love or hate me?"

"Heavens, James!" exclaimed poor May, thinking that her cousin was out of his mind, and terrified at being in the grasp of a madman, "what makes you ask so strange a question?"

"I wish to know—I will know, do not trifle with a desperate man, tell me before I bid you a final farewell, before I die—shall you weep or rejoice at my death?"

More and more convinced that her com-

panion was raving, she could not help glancing nervously at the bell, and trying to extricate her hands from him; but her strength was gone from terror, and she could not escape him.

"I am a fool," said he presently, "to frighten you so; you need not tremble and look scared —sit down, May, and let me sit beside you for the last, last time."

He drew her to the sofa, and she obeyed his injunctions, she was so afraid of driving him desperate. She had a nervous terror at the idea of insanity, it was almost the only thing she really feared—and she was fully persuaded that her unfortunate companion was a lunatic.

He put one arm round her waist, and he held her hand in his, and sat eyeing her for a minute or two before he spoke, then he said—

"May, your levity and vanity have cost me dear—by your idle flirtation with that man, and your wilful encouragement of his addresses, you have placed my life in jeopardy—to-morrow at this time, I shall either be a corpse, or I shall have fled across the Channel from the officers of justice."

May started and exclaimed, "James what do you mean? of what are you talking?" The truth flashed on her mind. "Are you going to fight with—" she stopped in excessive terror, and only fixed her eyes on him to finish the interrogation.

"With Mountsteven," ejaculated he, "yes, with that coxcomb—that traitor—and for you, May, for your sake—for your character—do you hear?"

"For me," cried she starting upon her feet, and thus escaping from his arm, "no, no, wicked man, it is for your own jealous passions —what has my name got to do with your quarrels; and what will it do for my character, that you should drag it before the public in this way?"

"Gracious, May; and is this storm of indignation the only feeling you display," said Wildey, suddenly laying aside his theatrical airs and attitudes, and speaking in a more natural tone. "Have you no concern for *my* life, which is endangered; selfish girl; you think only of yourself."

"None," vehemently retorted she, "if you do

not care for it yourself, why should I? but I do care for my honour, that is not mine alone; it is my husband's; what right have you to quarrel about it? I know—I am certain that Captain Mountsteven would not do anything to endanger it—it is all your own contrivance."

"And can you possibly be so childish as to think that I should risk my life for the simple purpose of vexing you; why, May, you must be a fool. I would not have engaged in the affair, could I have escaped it in any way; but it all arises, I tell you, from your own conduct, and you will be involved with me. Your husband will learn that your encouragement of Mountsteven, and his vain confidence in your preference, led to the disagreement, and he will then perhaps believe what hitherto he has seemed to doubt."

"For shame, for shame, James," interrupted May; "how dare you talk to me in this way? I do not believe in this duel at all—this is all a farce you are acting, to give you an opportunity of reproaching and insulting me; go away, you are a wicked man, and do not deserve the name of cousin."

"Now, May, you are most unjust and unreasonable," said he more gently, and again drawing her near to him. "Would to Heaven that there were no truth in the statement, that I could say it was a fiction! Not for my own sake, though I suppose no man likes to be a mark for a pistol-bullet, but for yours as well. I would give anything in my possession to hush up the affair, except my honour, that you cannot expect me to sacrifice!"

"Your honour; nonsense—make an apology—an explanation—on my account, for my sake, James, if you have—if you ever had the least regard for me—and you used once to care for me."

"I cannot, May, I cannot—he called me a villain and a liar, and I challenged him, Lord Marcus said I could do nothing else, and it was not from me the apology should come; tell *him* to retract his words, bid *him* apologize, and I will readily accept it."

"Then, what have I got to do with this—if Mountsteven thought you a villain, and called you so, why do you say, my name

or character is compromised. I see no reason for that."

"You do not understand these things, May; no woman can!—a man alone can judge of an affair of honour. However," relapsing into his gloomy air, "the thing is done, and there is no help for it, I come to bid you adieu for ever, May; think of me as one who always loved you, and sought your happiness, and whose last act in this world sprang from his unwillingness to hear a coxcomb soldier boast of your preference to himself."

Before May knew what he was about, he kissed her two or three times, and then ran out of the room.

She sat with clasped hands, and eyes wandering unconsciously from one object to another, whilst she ruminated on what had just passed. It would be shocking to have a duel fought in which her name could possibly be involved; and it would be still more shocking to have either of these young men killed. Though she did not like her cousin, she could not think of his running such a dreadful risk

without concern and alarm; and she was perhaps rather more concerned still for his antagonist. What could she do? Mr. Cameron was away, and would not be home till night, where could she go for advice? She had serious thoughts of writing to Captain Mountsteven, to induce him to make up the matter; she seized a pen—in a matter of life and death, it seemed to her, as if such minor considerations as proprieties and decorum and reserve must be laid aside—yes, she would address him—she had influence—she would try it.

She began after a moment's consideration:

"Dear Captain Mountsteven,

"I conjure you by honour, by all you hold dear—if you have any regard for my feelings or my character—if you value my esteem—renounce this design—"

"Nonsense!" thought she, suddenly throwing down her pen. "What will a man and a soldier care for this! I might as well talk to

the winds. I shall only compromise myself still farther; he will think, perhaps, that it is for his sake—that I interfere from love to him. Oh, if Mr. Cameron were only at home! Ah, I will write to him; he may be able to come and advise me, or he may know some way of preventing it."

She hurriedly penned a note to her husband requesting him, if he could, to return home—she had something particular to say to him. She instantly despatched this note, with the strictest orders to deliver it without loss of time, and when the footman had departed she felt a little easier. Still, she was in a state of inactive suspense, which was hard to bear. It might be an hour or two before her husband received her note; he could not come very soon; was there nothing she could do?

A brilliant idea suddenly occurred to her. She knew the colonel of Mountsteven's regiment; he was a married man, and she visited his wife. She would go to him; she would warn him of the intended duel; he would take measures to prevent the meeting. She had an idea that he would place the Captain under

would think of her, what he would imagine to be her motive. But, after all, James Wildey was her nearest relation; she had the best right in the world to be interested for him; why should any one wonder? At length, they reached the house. The footman knocked; what a time they were answering the bell! Suppose, after all, the Colonel were not to be at home; she had not thought of that before. It seemed like it, the servant being so long coming. What should she do, if she could not see him? Her heart beat violently with excitement; the door unclosed, and a maid-servant presenting herself, answered the footman's inquiries that both her master and mistress were from home; they had gone out of town for a few days.

May sank back in her carriage, perplexed and dispirited. What was now to be done?

"Home, home!" she impatiently ejaculated to the servant who waited for orders. "Perhaps," thought she, "Mr. Cameron may be home by this time, and he will help me." She looked eagerly forward as she drew near the

house, and, to her great delight, she actually saw a cab drive off from the door, to make room for her carriage.

Convinced that her husband had returned, in consequence of her summons, she alighted hastily, and without pausing to inquire, ran into the house; expecting to find him in his own room on the ground floor. As he was not there, she turned to look for him up-stairs, and inquired of a servant whom she met in the hall,

"Where is he gone?"

"Up-stairs, Madam, into the drawing-room," replied the man.

She ran lightly up-stairs, entered their ordinary sitting-room, and discovered to her utter amazement in the individual sitting quietly in an easy-chair, not her husband, but Mr. Arnold.

He rose slowly and lazily, and advanced to meet her, for she stood still, in surprise and disappointment, looking at him with open eyes and raised hands, and every appearance of astonishment.

"I am extremely glad that my presence

delights you," observed he, coolly, as he took her hand, and shook it; "your reception certainly is *empressée* in the extreme. Do not agitate or hurry yourself in bidding me welcome."

"Mr. Arnold, your appearance took away my breath; but I am glad to see you. I expected to meet Mr. Cameron, when I entered the room; but — you, you are a man of sense, you will probably do quite as well."

"If it depends upon my sense, no doubt; pray inform me of the interesting matter in which I am to do as well as your husband. Meantime, let us sit down, for I am tired, and besides, excitement is exhausting."

He threw himself into his arm-chair again, and May also sat down, and began eagerly to pour out an account of the projected duel, and her wishes to prevent it.

"James Wildey, eh! my precious brother-in-law! why, the fellow is a greater fool than I took him for. What in all the world can make him in such a hurry to put an end to his career, that he cannot wait to be transported as

a rogue, but he must needs run the risk of being shot, or hanged as a murderer!"

Such was Mr. Arnold's first ejaculation; then, he added presently, when May paused again:

"And what am I to do, Mrs. Cameron? act second on the occasion, eh?"

"No, no—all I wish is to prevent it."

"Nonsense, nonsense, let them go for a couple of fools, dolts, and idiots; why should any one interfere, or save them from the fruits of their own insanity?"

"Oh, don't say so!" cried she, imploringly; "think how dreadful it would be, if they were, really to be shot, when you could have perhaps prevented it!"

"Come, now," exclaimed Arnold, turning to her, "I will see what I can do, if you will answer me honestly and candidly one question: why do you want to prevent it?"

"Because it is murder which they intend Mr. Arnold, and—and it is shocking to think of—"

"And would you be equally anxious and

unhappy, if the parties were total strangers, of whom you knew nothing?"

"No, I think not; I should, of course, be sorry for them; but you must know this is partly my own fault—at least, I mean I am concerned in it—because—because—in fact—not that I could help it, really."

"I dare say you are right in saying it is your own fault; because you flirted with Captain Mount—what's-his-name, and made Wildey jealous, and so they quarrelled, if not actually about you, yet because of you. Am I right?"

May coloured, and bit her lip.

"I suppose my way of putting it sounds rather harsh," continued Arnold; "you, probably, have some soft, double-refined, delicate form of expression, which makes your part in the affair seem very natural, and excusable; but it comes to pretty much the same thing in the end!

"You see," continued he, not regarding her confusion, "I have a pretty regular chronicle of your proceedings and Wildey's, and all the

scandal of the neighbourhood transmitted to my wife. Some one amongst her former friends, sends her a monstrous budget of news; how she learns it does not much matter, but I fancy your housemaid, or some such person, is cousin, or grandmother, or daughter-in-law to theirs, and so they get their news cheap. I thought you had been going on rather foolishly for some time, and so I thought as I had come to town on business, I would take a look in on you, and give you a word of advice cheap. There it is."

"I am very much obliged to you," replied May.

"Not in the least, it is a selfish act on my part entirely; in the first place, giving advice has a natural relish which all people like; a liberal disposition in this respect is most common. Secondly, if you were to behave ill, and be turned off by your husband, you would interfere with our domestic arrangements at Littlemere, and that I should not like."

"All this time you are forgetting the thing I consulted you about, what can be done?"

"Ay, what is your opinion Mrs. Cameron? let us have that!"

"I am sure I don't know," said May, sorrowfully, "for the Colonel is out of town, or else I was in hopes he could have prevented the duel."

"The Colonel—bless the child, what has he to do with it? he could not interfere in any way, but we will set the police magistrates on their heels—what do you think of that? we will have them bound over to keep Her Majesty's peace for a year, will that satisfy you—will that keep them safe, think you?"

"Oh, thank you, thank you—will you go directly and give the information, I will order the carriage again, I will go with you myself; how glad I am you came to town to-day!"

"You are quite sure of the facts," continued he, as May rang the bell, "it is no idle gossip, no rumour without a foundation?"

May assured him that she received the information from her cousin himself, and she could not doubt it for a moment.

"I dare say he told you, that you might interfere; how glad the fellow will be when he

finds the *ruse* has succeeded! If I were quite sure now that he would get a tidy respectable wound, which would confine him to bed for a couple of weeks or a month, I would not move a little finger to prevent it."

"Oh, that would be a good thing," observed May, "I hope I am not very wicked to say so!"

"You do not seem particularly partial to my brother-in-law," remarked Arnold, "from which fact, I conjecture that the gossips who say he is too great a favourite of yours, are wrong in their stories."

"He a favourite!" cried May, thrown off her guard, "no, indeed—but Mr. Cameron likes him and trusts him very much. That, and my relationship are the reasons why he is a good deal with us, not that I have any pleasure in his society."

"It is a pity Mr. Cameron trusts him, for I have shrewd suspicions that he is a rogue,"

The carriage was soon at the door again, and May trusting herself and her anxieties entirely to the direction of Mr. Arnold, sallied forth with him to make another attempt.

In her eagerness for the object which engrossed her thoughts, and her satisfaction at finding that Mr. Arnold could assist her views, she quite forgot the summons she had sent to her husband, and the probability that he would return home, in consequence.

Mr. Cameron received the note without any very extraordinary delay, and in spite of his being very much wanted where he was, and extremely interested in the proceedings of the meeting, he could not resist his wife's wishes, but pleading an indispensable engagement, he instantly returned home.

He was not a little surprised, and rather annoyed, to learn in answer to his inquiries, that Mrs. Cameron had gone out nobody knew where, with a strange gentleman, whose name nobody had heard; she had left no message, nor had she mentioned whether she should soon be home.

Uneasy, surprised, and vexed at her thoughtlessness, he went up into her boudoir to see if he could discover any clue to her proceedings. The room was rather littered, and untidy; her desk was open, and her keys in it, although he

had several times begged her to be particular not to leave it unlocked, as she kept money there, sometimes to a considerable amount. Her gold and agate-handled pen lay beside it, unwiped—the ink had dried upon the golden point, and there too lay a bracelet which she seemed to have slipped off for the convenience of writing.

"Dear, careless, untidy girl!" thought he, as he sat down on her chair, and began to collect the scattered note-paper and envelopes, intending to place them in her desk and lock it. But he started back as his eye fell on a sheet on which he read Mountsteven's name in his wife's own handwriting. It had been pushed back hastily under some blank paper, as if for concealment, as he fancied, though in fact, she had done it when she impatiently rose to go to Colonel Andrews; the idea of any one seeing the writing having never occurred to her.

With a sort of fascination on him, the husband could not withdraw his eyes from the words which proved as he supposed his wife's treachery; to describe his various emotions would be impossible. There were the words

which too surely testified to her secret understanding with Mountsteven! probably she had been interrupted by the arrival of a visitor, and the unfinished note had escaped her memory.

How had his patience, forbearance, and kindness been misused; how had his affection been slighted, his honour trampled on! Cruel, unfeeling, treacherous girl! her protestations of attachment had been then a mere mockery, her promises of prudence and caution an hypocritical mask, a base deception more effectually to blind him; and he had been blinded, he had suffered himself to believe in her goodness and truth and candour, he thought her an angel—and found her a fiend!

Mr. Cameron was a man of strong feelings and passions, over these in the discipline of a long life he had attained an unusual mastery; his anger and his jealousy were alike slow to rise, and restrained and curbed in their expression even when excited; but once awakened they were powerful in proportion to their gradual birth; and whilst his outward manner concealed their energy, they seemed only the more deeply to imbue every feeling of his heart. His soul

was inwardly convulsed, but his appearance betrayed hardly any emotion.

He sat still, and looked round the room which on every side bore tokens of his indulgence to her caprices, his invariable acquiescence in her wishes. How many happy hours had he spent there; there was her piano, and the new music with which he delighted to supply her; how often had he sat in that *fauteuil* beside the music-stool, and listened enraptured to her magic voice! How ready had she always been to play to him, how often had she professed that she valued his admiration, so sincere, so heart-felt, far beyond the gay flatteries poured into her ears in public!

Could she be so base, so deceitful—so early versed in the blackest art; impossible! And yet, to what might not passion lead her, or any woman? There lay the evidence of her attachment to another before his eyes.

Oh, lost, lost—all was lost—honour, happiness, self-respect, wife, home, everything!

The thought occurred to him that she might possibly soon be coming home; he could not stay to meet her, he might in the present ex-

citement of his feelings be tempted into saying something which he should have reason to regret; he could not answer for his calmness, his self-control in such circumstances. No, he dared not risk it, lest the violence of his indignation should betray itself in words. He would bury himself in a crowd, he would seek the seclusion of numbers; he would try in business to forget his anger.

Taking up the unfortunate paper, which had so needlessly caused him all this disturbance, he folded and laid it in his pocket-book; the other things he left as he found them; what mattered it now if her private papers were thus carelessly exposed, if her gold was open to tempt the pilferer; the loss he believed he had experienced made all these things trifles in his estimation.

He left the house an angry and a sorrowful man, and he returned once more to the business from which he had been summoned: nor did those about him discover anything extraordinary in his manner or look; anything to excite remark, or attract attention.

But he found no consolation in the public

dinner in which he soon after played a part. The charitable nature of the act, brought him no more satisfaction or peace of mind than if he had partaken of the turbot, the mutton, or the ices, for the simple purpose of satisfying his appetite. And the conversation which passed between two individuals who sat opposite to him, was not of a nature to prove a panacea for wounded honour, or outraged affection.

His *vis-à-vis*, a youngish-looking man with an air of more fashion than sense, after detailing to his neighbour how he happened to have been hooked in by his governor for this dinner, which he knew beforehand would be a very slow affair, proceeded, with much vivacity, but rather less discretion, to relate various particulars relative to certain incidents, occurring during his yesterday's experience of the same meal.

The names which he repeated, caught Mr. Cameron's attention. Lord Marcus, Mountsteven of the Guards, and a fellow named Wildey. That the circumstance related to a disagreement between these latter, the anxious merchant soon made out: who was this Wildey

was asked; the gentleman to whom the information was imparted had never heard of him before. A shabby clerk — Lord Marcus patronised him for some reason unknown; one of Marcus' odd whims; besides he was a cousin of the beautiful Mrs. Cameron, of course he knew her? No, again—not personally at least—only by name. Not know Mrs. Cameron!—the lovely May Cameron — the gayest, most bewitching, most capricious beauty of the season; she was wife to the dullest, and richest of old men, he understood; for he had never seen him. Lord Marcus called them May and December; so did the Duke of ——, and Lady B——, everybody in short knew them as May and December, and a very favourable specimen of December he understood the husband was. Here, some one, better informed than the speaker as to the identity of Mr. Cameron, interrupted him with some remark, in a good-natured, but futile attempt to stop this gossip. The story was renewed the moment after, the whole of the quarrel-scene, with certain lively little additions of the speaker's own, was detailed; Mrs.

Cameron's name, or rather May's, for so the puppy affected to call her, was introduced, and connected much more broadly with the disagreement, than was warranted by facts, and the end of it all, the reputed duel to-morrow morning, was hinted at as a profoud secret, which the listener was on no account to reveal; although at least six other people were evidently devoting their whole attention to the story.

What Mr. Cameron's feelings were at this moment must be left to the imagination; his most prominent idea was, that he wished to sink away out of sight, and escape from the recognition which he feared would follow: he dreaded being recognised as the December of the story; but when the young man went on to state some circumstances which he knew to be false, equally derogatory to May, and disgraceful to himself, Mr. Cameron forgot his shame in his indignation, and observed aloud in a steady voice—

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Finley, but I think you are misinformed."

"Indeed," replied Mr. Finley, "I had it

from the best authorities. Lord Marcus told me."

"Then you may safely contradict his Lordship on the best of all authorities: I am the Mr. Cameron you are speaking of."

Mr. Finley looked a little sorry, and a little silly. He thought with some justice that he had probably said something not quite agreeable; and he had a sort of apprehension of what might come next. Nothing did however: but probably thinking he had said or done mischief enough for one time, he discreetly held his tongue, until such time as the departure of Mr. Cameron allowed him to feel himself safe and easy.

It was a relief to Mr. Cameron when he reached Hyde Park Gardens, to find his wife was not at home; she had gone out to the Opera, with the gentleman who had dined there, and of course was not likely to be back for some hours. Tormented by anger, jealousy, and disappointed affections, with all which passions he vainly struggled, in hopes of recovering his equanimity, he retired to rest, determined not to see his wife again that night,

and greatly doubting when they did meet what measures he should adopt to express his sense of her levity and treachery.

His prevailing idea was to send her at once, without ceremony, back to her uncle's in Lincolnshire; he could not bear the thought of seeing her smiles, hearing her voice, perhaps receiving her caresses, when he knew she was false; nor could he feel quite sure, that if he allowed himself to listen to her at all, she would not again bewitch his reason, and beguile him from his sterner purpose; to be again duped by her, now his eyes were really open, would be disgraceful to his sense. But could he answer for his firmness; even now, with the full conviction that her affections were bestowed on another, was there not in his heart a voice ever crying and pleading for her? It was a weakness he believed, but he felt it, do what he might. Something warned him that he judged her harshly, that an explanation was still in her power, would he but afford her the opportunity to offer it.

Agitated by such contradictory feelings, he lay long awake, debating on his unsettled plans;

and during the whole time, he was so engrossed by what immediately concerned himself and his wife, that he never gave a thought to the circumstance of the intended duel, nor could he exactly remember what had been the result of the quarrel, whether it had ended in a reconciliation or a challenge.

He heard May return home, but the sound of her voice only made him feel more angry, and he rejoiced that he had so carefully avoided a meeting. Beautiful, treacherous, faithless, ungrateful woman, soon they should part to meet no more!

CHAPTER VII.

> And Montague is bound as well as I
> In penalty alike; and 'tis not hard I think
> For men so old as we
>
> ROMEO AND JULIET.

In the eagerness of her peace-making zeal, May Clarence, as we said before, did not advert to the probability of her husband's return, nor did it occur to her to leave any message either to explain her errand, or mention her companion's name.

Mr Arnold not knowing exactly where the magistrates of the district resided, and May being in still more profound ignorance on the subject, it cost them some little trouble to ascertain and

discover the house of either gentleman. It was so late in the afternoon, that the court was closed of course; they then followed one magistrate to his residence, but he was not at home, and they were forced to go off in search of another. They had better luck this time, to May's great relief, for she had really begun to think there was some spell against her success. She waited in the carriage whilst Mr. Arnold went in, and gave the necessary information; then she was applied to for advice as to where the individuals in question were most likely to be found, and although she guessed her cousin would be at his own house in the city, she had not the least idea where the Captain was most probably to be met with; and she felt sadly afraid, that after all, he would not be caught in time to make the interference of any use.

Arnold was rather sarcastic on the subject of her misgivings, but on the whole he was really quite kind, that is, certainly he was not like Mr. Cameron, but he was well enough. The magistrate had promised to despatch a line to Mr. Arnold to notify when the affair was successfully wound up, as he never doubted the intense

anxiety with which this gentleman must contemplate the danger, and possible fate of his wife's murderer.

Things being thus settled, they drove home again, and May learned with chagrin, that she had missed seeing her husband, after giving him the trouble of coming to her.

"And now, Mrs. Cameron, I hope you mean to give me some dinner for my trouble, and take me afterwards to your Opera-box, for I vow that but for your fair face, those idiots might have blown out each others brains, so far as I am concerned, and nobody would have been any the worse for it. I took the trouble for you, now for my reward."

"Admirable gallantry!" replied May, laughing, "oh, yes, you shall have dinner and Opera both, I will go and dress, and shall be ready immediately the dinner is over." She did so, and by and bye she returned to him, looking very lovely—so beautiful that stoic as he was to woman's charms, and careless of anything but his ease, even he could not look at her without admiration.

"If you were my wife, Mrs. Cameron, I

would shut you up in a country-house, with a wall twelve feet high all round. No wonder you set young fellows by the ears for your smiles."

"I don't," said she, "and I wish you would not talk in that way; I cannot bear the idea of Mr. Cameron having reason to be jealous; he is not, you would not think so if you knew how good and kind he is!"

"I thought he was a good sort of man, but there are some queer things which I don't understand about him. There is a mystery about Wildey, too. Look here, do you know anything of these people? Anne says you do."

As he spoke, he held out towards her a letter, which he drew from his pocket. She looked at the signature.

"Harry Dunsford, oh yes! I knew them well once, they were such nice people—Grace was a darling friend of mine. I am afraid I used her rather ill!"

"I dare say, but don't talk, read the letter, and tell me what you think and know about it."

She obeyed him. It proved to be an appli-

cation from Dunsford for a situation as clerk in the foreign office in a large firm in London, with which it appeared Arnold was connected. He stated that he had filled a similar situation in Mr. Cameron's house, whence he had been dismissed when the establishment was reduced.

"What do you know of him?" inquired he.

"I know him to be a thoroughly excellent, well-principled young man," replied May, warmly, "in every respect qualified for the post he asks. Pray take him at once."

"Just like a woman! without references or inquiries I suppose! I shall ask Wildey," replied Arnold quietly, but looking closely at her.

May's face flushed, although she did not notice his scrutiny. "If you ask James, he will tell you a lie," was her abrupt answer.

"Bless us!" cried Arnold, "what's the meaning of this?"

"James hates the Dunsfords, and the Ashtons, and all belonging to them. He fears them, too—I am sure I don't know why! he made me drop their acquaintance, and that is the reason why I did not know where they were; but they are as good as he is base and bad."

"Upon—my—word, you express yourself with vigour; still I don't understand. For instance, in this one particular, how happens it that you, who in most things, are, to speak mildly, self-willed and head-strong, allow yourself to be governed by this base, bad man, Mrs. Cameron?"

"Oh, it is a long story, and here is dinner, promise you will help the Dunsfords, and leave the reasons to go to sleep."

"Not I," as he took her arm under his to lead her to the dining-room. "I'll help the Dunsfords, if you will tell me your story—if not, I must go to Wildey, and learn his. Come let's make a bargain on it."

"Not now," glancing at the servants who stole round their chairs, like spectres in livery, so noiselessly they trod, "it's private and confidential."

"Well, send away those fellows," said he, in Italian, "who wants four coxcombs to wait on two people—come, send them away, *bellissima* May, and you shall dictate terms for the Dunsfords, when you have earned the right."

She laughed and blushed, but complied, and

then with some shame and contrition, some hesitation, and yet a sensible relief to her mind, she told him all that had passed to connect James Wildey with her, and force her to submit to his dictates.

He listened calmly, without allowing his attention to be distracted from his dinner, and yet gathering up the meaning of her broken narrative; probably he held a clue in his hand to guide him through this labyrinth, or he never would have been able to connect the various fragments of her story, confused as it was by her confusion, digressing perpetually into episodes unconnected with the main subject, and then hastily and abruptly taking up the original topic, and going over the same ground in another tone, and taking another view of the subject

There," said she at length, "I believe I have told you all, I am sure I do not know whether I have made myself intelligible—it's not a very pleasant task, Mr. Arnold, to repeat all one's follies, and upon my word, I don't know what witchcraft you have used to get the secret from me. That I should choose you as a confidant—

you of all people—goodness, how one's feelings change! What do you think of me now?"

"I can easily believe," replied he coolly, "that it was not very agreeable to own all you have just now confessed, considering all the blame it throws on you. To be sure you have only acted somewhat like a goose, and a little wrong, compared with my excellent brother-in-law. His conduct is so black it makes your's look nearly white: but for all that you have done wrong, and may reasonably be ashamed of it. In the first place. you made a purely mercenary marriage, sold yourself for what?—I don't pretend to know how many thousands in present possession—and the church ceremony, which sanctified the bargain in the eyes of the world, merely makes it a little more hypocritical and deceptive in mine. Next being a wife, you were bound to have considered your first duty was to your husband, and any previous promise, must, in my opinion, have been in its nature annulled by his superior claims. You tried to serve two masters, and a pretty mess you have made of it. And then, it appears, not content with aiding

"Then take Grace a message from me, ask her to let me come and see her. Tell her anything you ought to tell her, to explain the past, and to persuade her to forgive my neglect."

"Very well, and what are we to do about Wildey; will you tell Mr. Cameron?"

"No, no, I cannot, indeed I cannot," cried May, more agitated than she had been before. "I could not tell him with what feelings I married him; it would break his heart—it would make him despise me; no—do not ask me to do that. I would not forfeit his esteem and confidence for the universe."

"I am not sure that you are right, but take your own way. I see you shrink from wholesome pain, like other women. I thought you stronger."

"If it were merely pain to myself, humiliation would not distress me, nor prevent my being candid with him. Do you not understand—it is pain to him that I dread, I would rather continue Wildey's slave for ever, than wound my husband's feelings so deeply."

"Do as you please! you are not my slave, so

I shall not dictate; perhaps you are right—at all events, you must run the risk; I shall say nothing to Mr. Cameron as to my suspicions of Wildey's conduct and his integrity. I could prove nothing, and mere suspicions it would be absurd to bring forward. So here the matter ends, and here is the carriage; put on your cloak, and come at once."

She obeyed him almost unconciously. Mr. Arnold standing by, quite unconcerned, whilst the groom of the chambers placed her cloak upon her shoulders; and then he followed her down to the carriage, half-whistling, all the way, with the most easy air in the world. There was silence between them for some time, May was making a great sacrifice in going out that night; she wanted to stay at home and meet her husband. She had so much to tell him, and she was so anxious to explain what she had been doing all day. But obliged as she was to Mr. Arnold for his ready assistance, she did not like to refuse him, and therefore said nothing of her wishes, determined to do it graciously, if she gave up to him at all.

Presently, she said, "I have been talking to

you, Mr. Arnold, as if you were my uncle, because I felt you were my uncle's friend. You will, I am sure, respect my confidence, and keep my counsel."

"I should hope so," replied he abruptly; then after a little pause he added "I believe, on the whole, Mrs. Cameron, you are a good girl, and really wish to do right; you have more spirit, sense and understanding than half your sex. I respect you for your own sake, as much as I wish you well for your uncle's."

"Thank you," said May; "don't spoil me with flattery."

"A girl who can bear a rough and unpleasant truth, without resentment, will not soon be spoilt by a word of commendation. I spoke harshly to you, to try your temper; and I am satisfied as to its quality; now let me make the *amende honorable* in saying what I can in your praise. Girl as you are, I esteem you; not because you are faultless, but because you can bear to hear of the errors you have committed, and try to retrace them. Shake hands with me in proof of friendship."

She gave him her hand with good will:

he pressed it warmly, and then said laughing, as he let it go;

"If you had not worn a glove, I should have kissed it, in token of peace; excuse my seeming want of gallantry."

"I am quite satisfied with the degree of your gallantry," said she, "it's more than I ever expected from you, by far."

Seated in the Opera-box, Mr. Arnold became silent and quiet; he withdrew into a shady corner, half-concealing himself in the curtain, and from thence he obtained a view of much of the house, without stirring, or making himself conspicuous. May seemed to give up her whole attention to the performance, and was so engrossed in listening to the music, and following out in secret a train of thought connected in her own mind with the drama, that she noticed nothing and nobody, until aroused by a voice beside her, which made her start, and turn round. It was Captain Mountsteven who had came round to speak to her. The confusion of her ideas for one moment was terrible; she hardly knew what she did, but

forcing herself to act and speak, she bowed, and coldly replied to his salutation.

He looked at the individual hidden in the corner, whom he had naturally supposed to be Mr. Cameron; finding his mistake, he drew a chair behind May and saying apologetically, that he wished to speak to her, he sat down without waiting for an invitation. With a grave face, she half-turned her head for a moment, then restored her attention to the stage: this was very different from her former manner of receiving him; a fact which he noticed with something between pain and pleasure. He was glad she was prudent, but he was sorry she should be piqued, and he fancied the latter feeling had something to do with her reserve.

"I think," said he, in a very low voice, "I am indebted to your intervention Mrs. Cameron, for the fact of being summoned before a magistrate this evening; am I right or wrong in my idea?"

She coloured, which she was sorry for, but could not help; turned her face quickly to-

wards him, then as quickly averted it again, and said.

"What gives you that idea?"

"The magistrate was a friend of mine, and we dined together when the little piece of business was concluded, and my belligerent antagonist gone; and I learnt from him, how he became acquainted with my affair: how *you* learnt it, is another matter."

"You are wrong if you think me the informer, that gentleman in the corner, my cousin's husband, and James Wildey's brother-in-law, was the active agent on the occasion; I own he derived the information from me, as I received it from James himself. Do you wish to be introduced, to thank him as he deserves?"

"No," said he, "I would rather ignore the whole affair; I mentioned it to you because I wished to explain—"

"Oh, never mind me," cried she hastily, "and pray let explanations sleep; if you are not obliged to Mr. Arnold for preventing you either murdering or being murdered, no more need be said on the subject. I suppose honour

is very different from morality, or in your cooler moments you would be glad to escape guilt, however, you may brave danger. Be it so, then; I am sorry your feelings are of a nature to be hurt, but being so, I am *not* sorry that the pain has been given them."

"You are unjust to me, Mrs. Cameron, and unkind; I am anxious to express to you my sorrow at having quarrelled with a relative of yours; not to make irritating speeches. Had I not been aware you were acquainted with the circumstance, I should not have alluded to it at all. I own I did not expect to find you so much displeased with me."

"You quarrel with my nearest relation, and propose to shoot him, and then you wonder I am displeased," exclaimed she, affecting an indignation she was far from feeling, in the hopes of putting an end to the dialogue, "I think the less that is said on this topic the better. *I*, at least, am obliged to Mr. Arnold for his timely intervention, having had more connection with this ill-judged affair than I like."

And again she turned her attention to the

house in so pointed a manner, as to give the Captain a very broad hint to withdraw. With all his Irish self-possession, he was unable to stand his ground, and he wisely retreated; whatever flattering ideas, the knowledge of May's exertions had given rise to, being completely dissipated by her manner. It was evident that tenderness for him, had not been her ruling motive, and for any thing he could see to the contrary, she cared as much for her cousin's safety as his own. As to this cousin's husband to whom she attributed the affair, he was such a plain, common-place man, so unfashionable in style, and so dull in feature and expression, that Mountsteven was divided between wonderment at his having had wit enough for the occasion, and surprise at May's allowing herself to be escorted and protected by so ungainly and rustic-looking a figure.

She sat, after he left them, unconscious of what she was gazing at, and forgetful of where she was, thinking only of the events which had occurred that day, and wishing for nothing so much, as the moment when she should return

home. At length, she could bear it no longer, the tumult of her feelings was so great, that she really feared a hysterical fit; she was forced to tell her companion that she felt ill, and wished to return home if he could get her carriage.

She was trembling so visibly, and looking so deadly pale, that it was evident she ought not to remain any longer, and Arnold telling her, if she would only keep quiet for a few minutes, he would run down and see for her carriage, that she might not have to wait at the door, left her hastily.

Scarcely was he gone, when her evil genius, James Wildey, entered the box, and sitting down beside her, said,

"I saw you alone, May, and I came to speak to you—"

"I am ill, James," interrupted she; "do not worry me now, I am going as soon as my carriage is announced."

"Ill, my dearest cousin, ah, how sorry I am, can I be of any use? command me!"

"None—I want no help—let me alone James!"

"May, tell me—did you reveal my secret, did you interpose to-day; you only knew of the circumstance; you must have been my guardian angel."

She was trying to revive herself with the scent of her vinaigrette, and did not reply to his questions: she detested him so much, she really had not patience to talk, besides feeling so wretchedly ill, as she did.

"If I might flatter myself that it was concern for me," continued he, softly "I never thought of such a thing when I saw you this afternoon; but I have been longing to thank you for it. I was harsh and cruel to you then too, and I wish to apologize. Forgive and forget; will you not, dear May?"

"James, if you mean about the duel, and your being bound over to keep the peace, as I hope you have—" she stopped in her hurried speech to look at him.

"I have, May," replied he.

"Then that was Mr. Arnold's doing and not mine. I never thought of such a thing; he proposed it and carried it out."

"With my honour as a gentleman; what had you to do with that?"

"Nothing that I know of, I never heard of it before," said Arnold with a sneer.

"What do you mean, Sir, by those words?" demanded Wildey, angrily.

"Only that I was not aware I had meddled with your honour."

"You were the cause, I understand, why I have been bound over to keep the peace, and thereby prevented righting myself for a gross insult given before witnesses. Is not this meddling with what did not concern you?"

"Yes, in some sense it is; for although, as a man, I suppose I am bound to prevent murder, bloodshed, and violence, as much as I can; yet, so far as my feelings are concerned, I own it would make little difference to me whether you were shot or hanged."

"For mercy's sake, Mr. Arnold, do not talk in this way," cried May, "you make me ill. Do be quiet, James, and if you cannot help quarrelling, go away."

"Do not alarm yourself, *bell' amica mia*," replied Arnold, looking with a smile at May's

agitated countenance. "You might remember of old, I never fight duels, *avec qui que ce soit*, and it is a game which requires two to play at."

"And you have tied my hands?" replied Wildey, with a sneer, "no wonder you strike boldly, when you feel you are safe."

"It was you who found fault," replied Arnold; "I received you in a most affectionate way, and I still think have done nothing really to injure or affront you."

He placed May in the carriage as he spoke, and then turned away as if not intending to accompany her.

"Are you not coming home with me?" said she, leaning forward anxiously.

"No. Good-night; I want to see the ballet."

The carriage-door was closed with celerity, and, in another moment, she was rapidly passing along towards Hyde Park Gardens. It was with great fear and uneasiness that she left the two gentlemen standing together at the door of the Opera House. In spite of Arnold's protestations, she dreaded lest some unpleasant

scene should ensue; she could not be satisfied that all was safe, or depend with any confidence on the fact that Wildey would not dare to quarrel after what had just occurred. Her nerves, perhaps, were shaken by the fatigue and excitement she had gone through that afternoon, acting as it did on a body weakened by a course of dissipation, enough to try a stronger constitution. It was probably bodily weakness which occasioned such a prostration of mental strength, that she was incapable of seeing or reasoning clearly on any subject.

She felt dreadfully agitated, harassed, and frightened, and it seemed to her as if everything which was in the least connected with her was going altogether wrong. Vague presentiments of unknown future evil still haunted her, along with sad regrets for the past; her faults of levity and carelessness, her weakness in yielding to Wildey, and her ingratitude in giving up Grace Dunsford, all rose before her mind with a blacker dye. She seemed to herself to have been following out a system of the most profound hypocrisy, making her husband believe that she was everything good and amiable,

whilst she felt herself to be exactly the reverse, unworthy in every respect of his affection, and unjust to his many excellent qualities.

In this state of mind, she reached home, and here she learnt with more regret than surprise, that her husband had retired for the night to his own room, as he was accustomed to do when she stayed out very late without him, for he complained that her irregular hours disturbed him too much when they occupied the same apartment. She had hoped to have seen him on her return home, but, however, it did not much matter; she resolved to get up early the next morning and breakfast with him, in pursuance of her determination in future to conform more to his hours, and try to suit herself better to his habits; he deserved this from her, and he should have it.

Mr. Arnold's remonstrances had awakened her to a consciousness that she had neglected her duty in more than one particular. Although her heart acquitted her of infidelity towards him, and she felt that it was in appear-

ance only that she had preferred another, her conduct had been very far from what it ought to have been. In a marriage between individuals of an age so disproportioned, great sacrifices of habits and tastes must be made to preserve conjugal peace; but when she asked herself who had made these sacrifices, conscience answered faithfully, her husband. From him had come the indulgence, the forbearance, the consideration which had alone prevented discord and dissension; she knew that, had he contradicted her, or thwarted her in her pursuit of pleasure, she should have probably resented and resisted it.

To her inclinations he had sacrificed time, money, pleasure; to amusements in themselves irksome or distasteful he had devoted hours at her bidding. To please her, his old pursuits had been abandoned, his old habits broken through; his nights given up to ceaseless scenes of dissipation, and his days no longer at his own disposal.

In short, his conduct had been generous, kind, considerate, indulgent; hers, careless,

selfish, overbearing, and disrespectful. She was more ashamed of herself after every retrospect, and she earnestly resolved to repair past errors, and obliterate their remembrance, by the change she intended to effect.

It was not now too late.

She was criminal in her own eyes, and conscious that she had much reason to blush for her past conduct; but she had done nothing which, in the lax morality of the world, need call forth a censure; she had sinned against her husband, in neglecting his comfort, disregarding his wishes, and trifling with his happiness; but he, she had no doubt, would readily forgive her. Nay, she doubted whether it could amount to forgiveness, where she believed no offence had been taken.

But, with all these hopes, she had still a world of anxiety in her mind. How far her name might be compromised, if Wildey's dispute with Mountsteven became public, and its result, also, she could not guess. Nor could she divine precisely what interpretation the latter might put on her conduct in the affair.

It had not struck her before that it would come to his knowledge, or that her motives might be liable to misconstruction.

Then, again, she was unhappy about the Dunsfords, and she felt as if she ought to do something, she could not tell what, to save Harry from the effects of Wildey's animosity. It seemed to her, that unless he secured a situation, equal to that which had been taken from him by her cousin, she was in some sort responsible for his loss. Nay, more, it struck her that perhaps the mere dismissal from her husband's house might have injured his character; for, of course, Wildey's secret reasons being such as could not be owned, he must have publicly assigned others for taking such a step.

Probably, these would not be of a kind at all calculated to exalt Harry Dunsford's character; how could she tell then, but that in silently acquiescing in his dismissal, she had not been art and part in an attempt to rob him of his good name; the possession on which his daily bread depended?

Dearly as any man must prize his good character, when he is happy enough to possess one, she knew it must be doubly valuable to such a man as Harry Dunsford; young, with his way to make in the world, and a wife dependent on his exertions. This was a fearful consideration, and one which, after it had once risen in her mind, took such a firm possession of it, as not to be shaken off by any effort of her will.

One thing alone comforted her; to-morrow she should know all. To-morrow Mr. Arnold would see Harry himself, learn from him what his real circumstances were, and let her know immediately. If, without injury to his character, she could then allow the past to sink into oblivion, if he could conscientiously say, that he did not desire Wildey's motives and conduct to be searched into, and that he could forego his claim to explanation, then all might stand as it now did, and Mr. Cameron need not learn what she still wished to conceal, and the knowledge of which she feared would render him unhappy.

But very different would be her duty, if Harry needed any elucidation of those counting-house mysteries which were connected with herself. If his character were really involved, and she could clear it, let the sacrifice be what it might, she must act boldly. She could no longer trifle with her conscience, or hide from her own eyes the path of duty that lay before her. Her character would sink in her husband's eyes; but what right had she to support her own at the expense of another's? what right had she to ruin the prospects of an innocent man and his wife? that wife being one towards whom she had professed, ay, and felt, too, the most unbounded friendship.

No, no, all must be given up of selfish pride, and unjust pretension; wrongly she had acted, and she must make amends; if guilt was hers, it was right that shame and repentance should be hers also; if she lost her husband's esteem, she lost what she never deserved to have enjoyed; and if she made him miserable by the knowledge of her misconduct—but here she stopped; such a possibility could not be con-

templated without the acutest remorse; she burst into a passion of tears and sobs, which lasted for a considerable interval with terrible vehemence, and ceasing only from exhaustion, left her to drop asleep from weakness like a child.

CHAPTER VIII.

The April's in her eyes—it is love's spring
And these the show'rs that bring it on. Be cheerful!
ANTHONY AND CLEOPATRA.

I suppose that a very large proportion of the quarrels and disputes which have ever occurred in the world to destroy the peace of communities, or families, have arisen from mistakes or misapprehension as to meaning or motives. This seems to be so universally acknowledged by us in theory, that misunderstanding has established itself as the popular name for slight disagreements.

But unfortunately in practice it is very different, for where such a misunderstanding

is found to exist, how few take pains to form a more correct view of the grounds of offence; and by explanation, and better information to do away with it! How few perhaps even recall to their minds the meaning of the word they use, and so make that allowance which should be made for the differences inevitable to human minds, and the difficulties and doubts which constantly attend all human language! Words veil the feelings rather than express them, and leave the hearers to infer from the imperfect outline what lies beneath; or perhaps the meanings they convey, vary in different minds, just as colours impress the beholder's eyes with such varying impressions of pleasure or pain.

If amongst the numerous discoveries of these days, there could be found some new form of conveying the mental emotions, of making those with whom we wish to communicate participate in our pleasure or our pain, and enabling us at will to exhibit each feeling as truthfully as if we dwelt in the Palais de la Vérité, should we be the happier, or the more miserable? I dare not say.

But certain it is, that could Mr. Cameron

have looked into his wife's mind at this juncture, and understood by intuition, as it were, all the feelings that actuated her, his own sentiments would have been considerably altered. All that sore and bitter mistrust, jealousy, and indignation at supposing himself duped must have vanished instantly, and peace would have been restored to them both.

It was not to be; and May had to learn a harder lesson yet, ere she recovered her self-approbation.

Her equanimity considerably restored by her night's slumber, she rose the next morning quite early for her, and when seated at breakfast in her dressing-room, sent a message to Mr. Cameron to request him to join in the meal. It was too late; the answer was that he had breakfasted, and was now engaged in business.

She was very much disappointed; she had bestowed more than ordinary pains on her morning toilette, and felt assured that her husband would be satisfied with her efforts to please him. However, it could not be helped; and hurrying over her own breakfast, indifferent

to everything except finishing quickly, from the fear that Mr. Cameron might go out before she had done, she hastened down stairs to his room.

Her light tap at the door, was answered by "Come in!" said in so cool a tone, that she supposed he did not know the sound of her fingers; although he usually rose and opened the door when she requested admission, on this occasion he did not stir, even after she entered.

He was sitting at his writing-table, with some half-folded letters before him, and a pen in his hand, but he was not writing, for the sheet of paper lying on his desk was blank. He was leaning his head on his hand, and as she approached him, he did not raise it; but as he sat there, she was struck with the sorrowful expression of his face, the contraction of his still dark brows, and the pallid hue of his whole countenance.

Fearing that he was engrossed by some unpleasant intelligence, she went softly up to him, and laying her hand on his shoulder, she stooped and kissed him. Instead of returning

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Presently she said, softly,

"Is anything the matter, Mr. Cameron?"

"I am very busy, and do not wish to be interrupted," was his answer, in a voice that sounded strange and harsh to her ears, it was so unlike his usual tone in addressing her.

"Can I not assist you in any way?" inquired she after a little hesitation.

"No."

Another silence ensued of several minutes duration; still he sat with the pen in his hand immoveable, and as if absorbed in reflection.

"I was so sorry I was out when you came home yesterday, Mr. Cameron," she began again, "but I could not help it indeed, and I

have been wanting to explain to you ever since. Do put down that pen and listen to me!"

"I thought I said, Mrs. Cameron that I was busy, and did not wish to be interrupted; least of all do I wish to hear explanations intended to mislead, and apologies which ought not be required; may I beg you to leave me for the present, and wait till I seek an explanation in my own way?"

Her astonishment at such a speech could not be depicted. The tone, the language, the glance of indignation and contempt in his eyes, as he turned them for one moment on her, all filled her with amazement. A feeling of indignation at his injustice and unkindness rose in her mind; her's was not the temper to suppress such passions, or to overcome evil with good. She did what no woman should do, if she values her happiness, she left her husband in silent anger. Let him be ever so unjust, or ungenerous, it is her part to soften by submission and patient endurance: if a couple part in passion, how can they meet again in affectionate confidence!

her caress, which on other occasions he never failed to do, he seemed rather to shrink from her touch, and drew himself away with a slight shudder. She was astonished, and hurt at a reception so different from what she had anticipated, and she stood for a moment behind his chair, hesitating whether she should speak or retire.

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She walked out of the room, her heart swelling with angry pride, and a resolution to say, or do nothing which should express her sorrow, or seem to solicit an explanation of his feelings. Could she have seen him, when left alone, her passion would have melted in a moment; could she have witnessed the painful emotion which agitated him, as he laid his head on his crossed arms over his desk; could she have heard the convulsive sob, with which he exclaimed, "Oh, May, May—my darling—my treasure—could you too deceive me—mock me—take advantage of my love! Would that I had died, believing you sincere and virtuous—would that I might die now, to set you free, and save you from farther error!"

Had she but heard this, she would have been at his feet in a moment; pride and anger would have vanished, and the misunderstanding would have been at an end directly.

She returned to her own apartment in a tumult of feelings, and there she sat down to think. A thousand bad thoughts came crowding into her heart at the moment, a thousand temptations to some foolish extreme.

And was this repulse the only return she was to meet with for all her recent determinations to do right, all her anxious consideration for him, and her kind resolutions to promote his happiness? Had she not sought to please him, to secure his society, to accommodate herself to his tastes that very morning, and was she to submit to such a reward? Contempt, reproach, disbelief, he had implied all that—oh, *he* should make the next advances, he should express his sorrow, he should sue for pardon, ere she smiled on him again. He might send her from his presence, there were others who would be thankful for her company; and unless his mind had undergone a revolution so entire as to make him quite another being, she felt that the means of punishing him for his unkindness were still in her power.

Oh, foolish, foolish May! little did she consider that at this moment she was hovering between domestic happiness and misery, and that the good or evil of future years, might depend on her resolutions for the present.

What was become of her determination to be kind, amiable, domestic; to return her husband's kindness, by complaisance; his forbearance, by considerate attention; his indulgence by cheerful obedience? One little speech of his, had dispersed all these resolutions, and for the time obliterated the remembrance of all she owed him.

Had she been true to her intentions, had she only sought by patient kindness and quiet submission, to win from him the secret of his anger, he would not have resisted her. Petulance, scorn, indignation, he could withstand, but one expression of affection, pained but not subdued by his injustice, would have won him. One sorrowful entreaty to be heard, one appeal alike to his tenderness and his candour, would have been irresistible, and the plots of her enemies, and the shades which accident seemed to attach to her character, would have been ineffectual to injure her happiness, or to shake his future trust in her.

May did not weep now, her cheek burnt, her heart beat, her hand trembled with emotion, but

Angry pride, and high disdain
Forbade the rising tear to flow.

She was sitting thus alone, absorbed in a thousand varying feelings, when she was startled by the abrupt entrance of Mr. Arnold, who, with his usual disregard of ceremony and etiquette, preceded the groom of the chambers, and rendered announcement from that individual alike unnecessary and impossible.

"Ah," said she, as she rose to receive him, "I am glad to see you. What tidings do you bring?"

"I have news for you, Mrs. Cameron," was his answer, "and occupation too, if you are at leisure. Can you come with me now?"

"Oh yes!" was her eager reply; she felt so glad to have any thing to do, which might even for a brief period dissipate the painful sensations preying on her heart. "I will come instantly. Shall I order the carriage?"

"No, walk!" said he, gravely; "or if you cannot, I will take a cab, for a part of the way, to go with your carriage and fine liveried lackeys, would be to insult the poverty you have yourself caused."

"Good heavens!" cried May, startled at the tone, "what do you mean?"

"I will tell you as we go along, get your bonnet and shawl—don't put on any fine frippery, and leave those trumpery gold chains behind you. I will not walk with a woman in fetters, be they gold or silver. They are the badge of a slavery to fashion, an indulgence in show and extravagance, permissable on state occasions, but insufferable in daily life, indecent on a visit of charity."

May quietly took off all her bracelets, as her strange visitor spoke.

"There, do you feel very miserable," added he, as he watched her operations, "now be quick please—time is precious to me at least."

She soon returned, plainly dressed for her excursion. He eyed her complaisantly.

"That will do very well. Where's your husband? Out!—or can he spare you?"

"Oh, yes, he can spare me well enough," replied she with a sarcastic smile, "no fear of that."

"Hey! what?" exclaimed he directly, per-

ceiving in a moment that there was something wrong there, "do I read your face right—you have had a difference—a dispute?"

"Never mind," replied May, trying to look unconcerned, "I am at your service now, at all events, so come at once."

"Hum," said he musingly, as he walked down stairs by her side, "I will not mind now, certainly, because I want to talk to you of something else, but I will not do things by halves; and we will find out the meaning of that little sarcastic smile, when we have settled this other business."

They issued from the house, and he drew her delicate hand under his arm, without even the ceremony of asking her leave, then they set out at a quick pace, eastward.

"Have you seen the Dunsfords then?" at length May inquired, finding he said nothing.

"I have, and I wish you to see them, too; it is, however, a good way to go, and if you get tired you must tell me. I am no judge of young ladies' strength of limb."

"And how was Grace?"

"Ill."

"Oh, I am sorry—and unhappy?"

"No, I think she seemed more contented than you do."

May was silent.

"She did not much wish to see you," continued he.

"Indeed!"

"She thought you were proud and ungrateful, and undeserving her friendship."

"Did she say so, Mr. Arnold!"

"No, but she felt it, Mrs. Cameron; she ought to feel it. You have seemed so, you cannot deny the fact."

"I never meant to do so; I acted under a constraint, an odious constraint. I have suffered deeply for my folly."

"Perhaps, I am sure you deserve to do so!"

"You are bitter, Mr. Arnold," replied May, the tears forcing themselves into her eyes.

"Am I not just? Upon my word, to find you sitting in your luxurious drawing-room, surrounded with all that can make life charming, covered with gold and jewels, and pouting and dissatisfied in the midst of it all; having

just left your victim and her family, so cheerful in misfortune, so trustful, so industrious, so patient; *is* almost enough to make one question the decrees of Providence, and quarrel with the disposition of events."

"If you wish me to walk with you, Mr. Arnold," cried May much agitated, "cease your reproaches for the present—I cannot bear them."

"What, you resent my plain speaking!—foolish girl, go home, then. I have done with you. I will repair your errors alone, and leave your conscience burdened with its load."

"No, no, no," exclaimed she warmly, and keeping fast hold of his arm, with her trembling hand, "you mistake me, indeed you do. Let me act now with you; and once in doors, I will listen to your reproaches with humility; but if you only knew all that has occurred to agitate me, you would spare me an excitement I can ill bear. You surely do not want to make me a mark for public animadversion as we walk."

Her pale cheeks, trembling lips, and broken voice as she spoke, touched him.

"I will say no more—indeed, I have said too much—you will think me quite a brute. You have a heart, I see. Compose yourself, my dear."

She was struggling with her feelings, which were really too excited to permit her to speak. They walked on for a quarter of an hour, in profound silence, and at a slackened pace; then Arnold suddenly hailed a cab, and without saying anything more to her, put her inside, and jumping in after her, bade the man drive them to a particular part of Holborn.

She sat still, full of apprehension as to what she was going to see, and what degree of blame for the past might attach to her; he did not look at her; his face was turned towards the window. He did not wish to add to her embarrassment by observation.

So they went on, still in silence, until they reached their destination; he then dismissed the cab, and leading his companion up a narrow street, he stopped at the door of a somewhat small shabby looking-house. The ground-floor seemed to be a sort of inferior dress-maker's;

there were old-fashioned shapes of bonnets lying in the window, and a common-place looking gown or two thrown across a table. May noticed this, as they stood below in a close dark room, half-shop, half-parlour, whilst a slatternly girl, who had been working there, went up at Mr. Arnold's desire, to learn if Mrs. Dunsford was at home, and could see them.

May felt much afraid that her former friend might refuse to admit her, but after a few minutes delay, the girl returned half-way down stairs, and shouted, "please to walk up, you are quite welcome."

On this invitation, they made their way up a steep, narrow, winding stair-case, so dark that May felt almost frightened, and on the small entry at the top, standing in the light of the open door, was Grace herself awaiting them. There was a slight degree of agitation in her manner, and a something between constraint and nervousness in the tone of her voice, as she advanced a step, and said:

"It is very kind of you, Mrs. Cameron, to come so far to see us, I am happy—" but her

words were cut short by May's emotion. Grace had hesitated as to holding out her hand, fearful of taking a liberty with her former friend; but Mrs. Cameron threw her arms around her, and yielding to the feelings which had been swelling in her bosom, burst into a passionate flood of tears, mingled with broken ejaculations of tenderness and remorse. Grace could not for a moment resist such evidence of affection; her sense of ingratitude and unkind treatment, and the coldness necessarily resulting from such ideas, gave way at once; she clasped May fondly to her, and kissed her cheek again and again, too much excited and agitated to speak.

Arnold interfered after a minute's pause, he quietly but resolutely drew May away from her friend, led her into the room at the door of which they were standing, and placing her on a chair, said to her in a low voice,

"Be quiet now, Mrs. Cameron, your vehemence will hurt your friend, and can do neither of you any good; control yourself, my dear."

There was something in the cool self-

possession of Arnold, his authoritative manner, his disregard of the common forms and nice ceremonies of ordinary life, which always exercised an extraordinary power over May's mind. Had he limited his interference to words of exhortation or sympathy, he would have been as little attended to as the wind; but the unceremonious way in which he exerted his personal strength to separate them, and his commanding tone when he bade her to be quiet, were alike irresistible. His superior power of mind controlled her, and in a very short time she had succeeded in checking her sobs, and could look up and speak with composure.

Grace was standing by her side, with eyes in which affection seemed to have resumed its place; as May looked up with an attempt to smile.

"You are better now," said she, kindly; then wishing to relieve her by diverting her attention, she said: "Here are some in the room who will claim acquaintance with you!"

Arnold, who had been bending over her, supporting her with his arm, now rose and drew back, and May looked round.

It was a small, low room, without much furniture, and such as there was, was of the commonest kind; the windows, partly open, commanded of course a view of the opposite house, and such a narrow strip of blue sky as the street could afford. A few large geraniums and straggling fuschias stood on the window-sill. Before one was a table, and at this table, seated as if engaged in teaching, was Harry Dunsford, whilst on either side of him were George, Julia, and Sarah Ashton, apparently engrossed by certain copy-books, slates, or grammars lying before them, though it must be confessed the little girls were casting furtive glances behind them at the visitors, whose appearance was as novel as it was interesting. At the other window, in a large easy-chair, the only article of furniture which seemed designed for comfort as well as use, sat Mr. Ashton himself, and, from the vacant seat beside him, the work-box, and materials lying on the table

close at hand, it appeared that Grace had been sitting by him, engaged in needle-work.

"Harry," said his wife, turning towards him, "you have not forgotten Mrs. Cameron?"

He was bending intently over something on the table, and May's conscience told her that it cost him a struggle to come forward and speak to her. She was sure that he must feel himself ill-used and oppressed; it was natural he should be angry.

She was not quite right, however; Harry hesitated at speaking to her, and would have gladly escaped her notice, and quitted the room; but it was entirely from concern and regard for her feelings, not from any sentiment of ill-will or resentment. He pitied her; he was sorry that she should see the change in their circumstances, which had been occasioned by her cousin's malevolence; he feared to increase her pain; so far from attaching blame to her, for her share in the past, he had always endeavoured to persuade his wife that she probably knew nothing about it; and he

attributed to her, and quite justly, too, all the sensations of regret, mortification, and sorrowful shame, which in her place he would have experienced on such a discovery.

On this summons from his wife, however, he came towards her, and taking the hand which she eagerly proffered, he shook it with an air of perfect cordiality and good-will, saying:

"It is very kind of you, Mrs. Cameron, very good of you to remember us still."

"No, no," said May, warmly, "the kindness, the goodness are on your part, to receive me with a readiness I do not deserve."

Then, turning towards Mr. Ashton, she was about to step up to him, but Grace laid her hand on her arm and stopped her.

"My dear, do not address him; it's of no use; he would not understand, and your name might awaken painful ideas."

The tears stood in the daughter's eyes as she glanced at her father's faded and shrunken form, and May, looking again at him, saw,

with a feeling of painful surprise, that his countenance, once so acute and intelligent, was now indicative only of passive imbecility. He was listlessly winding round his fingers a strip of the material on which Grace had been working, and his lips moved at intervals, as if engaged in mental calculations. May was shocked as she saw the sad ruin that had fallen on the man whom she recollected so active and self-possessed. Was this, too, her work?

"Now, Dunsford," said Mr. Arnold, "can you come out with me? I will take you down to the office, and we will see the other partners, and talk over matters. Mrs. Cameron will sit here with your wife for an hour, I dare say; they will have plenty to say to each other, and she will not mind waiting." Then stooping, he whispered in May's ear: "Now, be a good girl, as I know you can, and don't excite or agitate her. Her state will not bear it, and she has had trouble enough, poor thing! Remember, there are two lives at stake now in her well-being."

"I will remember," said May, softly. She had indeed noticed that her friend was not in a state of health to make agitation of no consequence, and her pale cheeks and heavy eyes intimated only too plainly that she had much to bear.

As soon as the gentlemen were gone, Grace drew her chair, and sat down with May, telling Julia to take her needle-work and place herself beside her father, who, she observed, although he seldom spoke, and never noticed anything the least removed from him, liked to have some one close to him, to convince him that he was not quite deserted. Grace herself resumed her embroidery, observing in an apologetic way, that she could not afford to sit idle.

"Give me something to do for you," cried May, "it will be the greatest kindness to me."

Mrs. Dunsford felt it would, and quietly, without ceremony, thanks, or remark, placed in her hands a part of the work which occupied herself. It was a beautiful baby's mantle, to be braided in an elaborate pattern, and she gave

May the cape to finish, as she said she was quite sure she would be able to do it properly; she remembered her skill in fancy needle-work.

Her fingers thus busily employed, her mind became calmer, and she was able to inquire, in a quiet and collected way, into her friend's circumstances and prospects.

Grace was at first a little reserved; but May conquered this, and at length persuaded her to speak openly and plainly.

"If you wish me to have another easy hour, or to enjoy a moment's self-satisfaction, Grace," said Mrs. Cameron, urgently, "you will let me know how I can be of use to you. I owe you much—I have much to repair—tell me, then, what I can do?"

"I do not know that you can do anything, dear May; we shall, no doubt, struggle on; there are some privations we must endure, but we have youth and love for each other, and a firm trust in Providence. Do not fear; we shall not be forsaken. We are not unhappy, although we have difficulties."

"Where is Jane?"

"Jane is very fortunate; she has a situation as governess, nursery-governess, in a family near Windsor—Harry's aunt got her that; and her salary, though small, is sufficient to keep her."

"And is she comfortable?"

"I hope she is, because it is her own fault if she is not. I do not mean to say that she has stepped into a Paradise; there are, I know, many things to endure — trials of patience, humility, fortitude; but, May, this life is a life of discipline, and we all need these trials to perfect us. It matters little where we are, or how we are, rich or poor, every situation alike has its evils—no, I will not call them evils—its lessons, and when these are learned perfectly, the pain and trouble cease. Learning the letters is a weary task, but who regrets it, when they can enjoy a book?"

"True, Grace, dear, most true; it is the undisciplined heart which is the evil. Oh, I feel that every day of my life. I wish I were like you!"

"*L'homme est bien, comme il est,* is true in more senses than one; and there is no need, dear, that you should wish to be another than what you are!"

"I would like to think and feel as you do, then, Grace; so wisely, so justly!"

"Ah, I stand in the shade, May, and it is far easier for me to see things justly, than for you whose eyes are dazzled by the blaze of worldly prosperity, and unvarying happiness."

May sighed, and exclaimed, "Oh!" then abruptly checking herself, she said in another tone:

"And Robert, where is he?"

"Happily, in the same office as ever; his employers are well satisfied; and next year he will have a salary."

"And these three are at home, then," said she, looking at the children as she spoke.

"Yes, it was a great grief that George was forced to quit his school—the expense was too great; but Harry has been a kind tutor to

them all; and having nothing else to do, I really do not think George has gone back in his education, and it was a great advantage to Harry to have such a motive for exertion. Dear Harry! he is so good, May."

"And is Sarah of any use to you? Julia, of course, is; she is almost a young woman now."

Julia drew herself up, and tried to look as womanly as she could. She was a plump, rosy lass of about ten; Sarah was but little turned six.

"Oh, yes," said Grace, in answer to May's question; "we are all of use, we all help one another, and Sarah reads nicely now, and helps over many an hour which might otherwise be dull or weary."

May glanced timidly and fearfully at Mr. Ashton; Grace's eyes followed the same direction.

"My poor father!" said she, sighing, "it was paralysis. It came on almost immediately after he left Mr. Cameron's office, and he has been helpless, and as you see him, ever since."

Mrs. Cameron turned sick at heart; her head grew dizzy; she could not see. She felt as if she had been accessory to a murder. It was some minutes before she could speak again; but, resolutely struggling with her agitation, and determined to learn everything she could, even though every revelation was a new penance to her, she said presently:

"Does he suffer much?"

"No, thank Heaven, not at all. The suffering is to us who see him so. And perhaps, after all, it is better as it is—no, why should I say, *perhaps*, as if I doubted that; it *is* better as it is. He is spared much pain, anxiety, humiliation; he feels no consciousness now of disgrace; he still fancies himself pursuing his former avocations for the support of his family, and at the regular hours, as formerly, he believes he returns from the office to his fireside; he joins with us in prayer and praise, and he is happy. Ought I not to be thankful for this, dear May?"

May's lips trembled; she could not speak, and

Grace bent her own head over her work, to hide a tear, which would spring to her eye, and to recover her own composure.

In a few minutes, she began again.

"I am not always so trustful as I ought to be, May—my approaching confinement has caused me much anxiety; I sometimes asked who would take care of him, who would attend to the house, how should we pay both nurse and doctor?"

"Then, you have pecuniary difficulties," said May.

"Oh, yes of course, suddenly losing their salaries, as my father and husband did at the same time, we became dependant on the allowance Harry's aunt had settled on us; and for so large a family, the whole of that would be scanty enough. Then my father's dreadful illness incurred heavy expenses, which the sale of our little household property barely covered; and there are insurances on his life, and on Harry's, which must, if possible be paid, or the children will be left destitute hereafter. You can imagine how this cramps us. Robert, dear

fellow, wanted us to sell his share in the insurances, and set up a little shop; he says he can maintain himself next year, and could not bear that even now, his father should be pinched at all; and if Harry does not get this situation, we must perhaps do something of the kind. But we have put it off as long as possible."

"I have no doubt as to Mr. Arnold employing him," replied May, "he is odd, but he is just and sincere, and I know from his manner, that he will befriend you all."

"I believe so; he has been sent at a moment when my heart was sinking with mistrust, and the struggle for cheerful confidence was most severe. But, oh May, I have been so happy in my husband; sorrow and trial, poverty and perplexity only make us love and trust each other better. He is so truthful, so considerate, so affectionate, we have never had a cloud, a disagreement, a misunderstanding for a minute, and were I asked, I could on my conscience aver, that I have been as his wife, one of the happiest women in the world. Heaven bless him for it!"

May gave one bitter sigh. The contrast of these expressions, and her own discontented angry sensations that very morning, struck her powerfully; and why was there this difference between them? Conscience answered loudly, the difference was in their heart.

"And is this robe for your future baby?" inquired she, presently.

"Mine, oh no, it is work for which I shall be paid, and I hope by similar exertions to lay by enough to pay my nurse, and all the principal expenses of my illness. Jane and Julia have made most of my baby-wardrobe. I should have liked well to have worked at it myself, but I could seldom afford the time."

"Oh, Grace, happy, happy Grace," exclaimed May suddenly, after a pause.

Her friend looked up in amazement; Mrs. Cameron's eyes were swimming in tears, and Mrs. Dunsford fancied from the look and tone which accompanied her words, that there was something on her mind she wished to communicate. After a little consideration, she said to her sisters, that she thought they had better go

out for a walk, George would go with them, and they might stay out for half an hour.

No sooner were the two matrons left together, than May could no longer conceal her own feelings ; forth came her tale of sorrow, of faults, of shame, of penitence, her galling slavery to her cousin, which had caused so much the larger part, her own vanity and wilful selfishness, which had added to her errors. Her husband's kindness trifled with, his forbearance trespassed on, until now when she had learned to value both, they were suddenly, unaccountably withdrawn, and she was left desolate and miserable. To tell him all, to confess to him the whole of the past, to reinstate Dunsford in his character, at the expense of exposing Wildey's unjust proceedings, and her own ungenerous conduct, to sacrifice all chance of regaining her husband's good opinion, rather than continue the dark and tortuous path into which her cousin's guidance had led her, such was now her resolution.

The glow of pleasure with which Grace thought of her husband's character being cleared, was checked by the pain impending over her

friend, she urged her to calm consideration, to careful adjustment of right and wrong, and whilst admitting the necessity of candour, she yet suggested discretion in her revelations. Let her confession be the act of her dispassionate reason, not the result of excited feelings: this would reinstate her in her husband's heart, and effectually prevent all future misunderstanding.

CHAPTER IX.

MARG. Thy friends suspect for traitors whilst thou liv'st
And take deep traitors for thy dearest friends.

RICHARD II.

ON his wife quitting the room in silent indignation, Mr. Cameron had for some time given way to a painful emotion, which prevented him from calmly viewing the state of affairs, or considering what he ought to do. But, as this gradually subsided, he became conscious that in refusing to hear May in her own vindication, or even to tell her of what he suspected her, he was hardly just and fair. His dread of being deceived by her arts, of becoming a puppet in her hands, of yielding himself a

slave to her caprices, through his affection for her, ought not to prevent him acting with justice and candour. If she was faithless or treacherous, it was no reason that he should be austere and tyrannical, and if she were really innocent—if his suspicions were unfounded—his fears uncalled for—his anger unjustifiable—if this were the case, what had he done, and what name could apply to his conduct bad enough to designate his idea of it?

Filled with this thought, he rose, and determined to seek an explanation; he took from his desk that unfortunate note, which had so excited his jealousy, and without looking again at it, he proceeded up-stairs to seek his wife in her own apartments. Of course, he sought in vain, she was gone. In her boudoir, the table was scattered over with those costly baubles, which at Arnold's suggestion she had removed from her wrist, and no other trace of her remained. The servants when questioned, only knew that she had gone out on foot with the same gentleman who had been there yesterday to dinner, and had proceeded to the Opera with her

at night. No one could tell his name, nor whence he came, nor whither they had now gone.

Perhaps at any other time, or under any other circumstances, Mr. Cameron might have hardly thought of this at all, but now the sort of mystery which seemed to conceal his wife's proceedings, vexed and irritated him. Dissatisfied with himself, he was of course more easily displeased with the things around him, and he doubted May the more, because he could not account for her motives and actions.

Since, however, she was gone, he resolved to go out, too; he determined to proceed to the counting-house, and see what Wildey had been at, there was some explanation due there, also; if he remembered rightly, there had been something said last night about a duel, in which his head clerk was concerned. How could it be that he had forgotten this till now, that he had allowed the affair so entirely to escape him, that he had taken no measures to interfere or to prevent it? It was a culpable negligence on his own part, which he could not excuse; now

he would go immediately and inquire into things. Accordingly, he ordered his carriage, and set off.

Wildey was at the counting-house as usual, and shewed no wounds, nor other marks of having been engaged in warfare. He looked as handsome, as well-dressed, as much the man of fashion as he could, and he came when summoned into the merchant's private apartment, with an air of self-possession and self-satisfaction indicative of far more peace of mind than he really enjoyed.

The clerk in fact was in a state of extreme perplexity and uneasiness. The discovery of Arnold's visit to town had disturbed him a good deal; he had an instant presentiment that something bad would come of it, and Arnold's subsequent conduct had very much heightened his alarm.

In an interview that morning, which he had been unable to avoid, his brother-in-law had pressed unpleasantly for some definite charge against the character of Harry Dunsford, to account for the pertinacity of his persecution.

Every application which the discarded clerk had made for employment, after the most favourable opening, had eventually died away in an unaccountable manner; no charge was ever brought against him, no fault assigned, but the invariable consequence of a reference to Mr. Cameron had been, that the individuals with whom he was negotiating, had altered their plans, or they had been suited elsewhere, or they did not need his services. In fact, they rejected him. It was in vain to demand a reason, and although convinced that Wildey's ill offices were at the bottom of it, he had no chance of rectifying the matter, nor the slightest ground on which to enter an action for defamation, as he might have done, had Wildey's name appeared.

Arnold warmly took up his cause, and insisted on learning the precise reason assigned for the dismissal both of Dunsford and his father-in-law. Wildey grew angry, and protested against an interference so totally uncalled for. But Mr. Arnold denied that it was uncalled for; he said he wished to employ Dunsford himself, he had therefore a right to learn his character, such as Wildey had found it to be.

It was vain for the wily clerk to try and perplex matters by a multitude of words, or by any of those subterfuges and evasions which might blind an inferior intellect; Arnold was not to be hood-winked or cajoled, and he ended with stating coolly, that if Wildey's account of the transaction was so extremely unsatisfactory and vague, he would at once apply to Mr. Cameron, would insist on an accurate investigation, an examination of books and accounts, which would, he imagined, prove who had done their duty in the office, and who had neglected it.

Carefully abstaining from so much as hinting at Wildey's criminality, he yet said enough to alarm the clerk in good earnest. He then abruptly left him without coming to any conclusion, or allowing him time to arrange his ideas, and settle on the form of speech least dangerous to himself, in which to couch his own justification and confession combined.

Mentally cursing the chance which had given him such a brother-in-law, and still more the circumstances which had brought them in opposition, Wildey continued to reflect on his plan

of action for the future, so as to secure himself and crush his opponents. In this he was interrupted by the summons to attend Mr. Cameron, and he joined him, with a heart palpitating from fear and guilt, but a countenance admirably composed and steady.

"Wildey," said Mr. Cameron, mildly, as the door was closed on them, "I wished to speak to you on a strange affair, which has come to my knowledge."

Which of all the strange affairs in which James Wildey was then involved was the actual topic now forthcoming, the culprit could not guess.

Railroad speculations, and short comings in the commercial affairs, impertinence to old friends, injustice to clerks, his house and establishment in Fitzroy-square, his insolence to Mrs. Cameron, and his defalcation in the books, all flashed on his recollection, and created a considerable confusion in his mind. However, he put a bold face on it, and replied instantly.

"I am sorry for it, my dear Sir, if it is disagreeable as well as strange, because really you

do not look well enough to enter on unpleasant subjects. I am sure something has happened to agitate or excite you greatly: I grieve to see the ravages anxiety produces, let me entreat—implore you to take care of your health, so precious to all who know you."

"Never mind my health, Wildey, though I must own you are a good fellow, and really seem to care for me; but come, explain to me if you please, what is this that I heard about a challenge and a duel. Is it true?"

"I cannot presume to say, Sir, unless I know what you did hear," replied Wildey, with an internal relief, for he did not expect much difficulty in explaining away the facts of a duel never fought.

"So far as I understand them, the case was that you challenged Captain Mountsteven, and were intending to fight with him. Is this true?"

"Perfectly."

"And have you fought, or are you going to do so?"

"Neither, Sir, the affair became public; at

least so far public that the magistrates interfered, and we were both bound over to keep the peace."

"Ah—and what business had you, young man, to indulge your angry passions, by either perpetrating, or provoking murder?"

"The right of civilized man, Sir, to defend the dearest possession I have—my honour!"

"Your honour—eh!—and what put your honour in jeopardy?"

"The insolence, presumption, and criminal intentions of my adversary."

"Eh—fine talking—but I hold that the man who breaks the laws of his country, and his Maker for what you call honour, deserves to be punished as a murderer; what do you say to that?"

"That if I were to be punished twenty times over, I should still do the same—that I cannot endure the stigma cast on my name as a liar and a villain, merely because I stand up to defend the character of one—but I need say no more; the origin of the quarrel you had better not learn; it would be too painful. I am sorry to

have incurred your displeasure, but I should, under the same circumstances, do the same again; and my conscience would justify me in it."

"You are a bold fellow, Wildey. Be so good as to tell me why you quarrelled with this young officer? I have a particular reason for wishing to know!"

It flashed on Wildey's mind, as he spoke, how he might extricate himself from his difficulties. To work on Mr. Cameron's already awakened jealousy, and succeed in removing him from London for a period, would allow him time to arrange affairs with Arnold, and prevent unwelcome revelations. It would prevent any further intercourse between May and Mountsteven, and thereby obviate the danger of any more quarrelling on his part; and as he had already proposed such a plan, he had little doubt but that now the means to carry it out were in his power.

In answer to Mr. Cameron's last question, therefore, he replied:

"And I have a particular reason for wishing not to tell you."

"Pooh, pooh! the thing is past; and to own it all can do you no harm, my good fellow."

"I am not afraid of its doing harm to me; it is for the sake of others that I hold my tongue."

"Indeed! for whose—not for mine?"

"Partly, and partly for that of another person concerned."

"Wildey," said Mr. Cameron, earnestly, and laying his hand on his arm with a look of deep anxiety, "tell me, I implore you, was my wife's name concerned in it?"

"Why will you persist in forcing from me facts, which will torture you to know, as much as they do me to speak?" exclaimed the young man, with well-acted reluctance, and turning away as he spoke.

"Because I must know the truth," replied Mr. Cameron, still more solemnly, "that I may decide how to act."

"The truth—ah, who can decide on the truth in this deceitful world! To look at her, you would think truth and candour written

on her brow," said Wildey, with an energetic sigh. "Do not look for truth, Mr Cameron; shut your eyes, and be sweetly deceived."

"Wildey, if you have any regard for honour and honesty, tell me how and in what way Mrs Cameron's name was concerned in this dispute. I must know."

"My dear Sir, I will tell you all: in the warmth of discussion, there was a boast made of an interest in my cousin's affections, which brought on a denial. The lie was given, and would not be taken calmly; a challenge followed, and a duel would have ensued, but a hand interposed; your wife, Sir, learning what was threatened, herself gave the information to the magistrate, which perhaps has saved the life of a guilty man. The motives for her interference you may imagine. They may or may not have been such as you could justify; but if she told you none of this—if her exertions yesterday were made without your knowledge and consent, I grieve to think of all that it implies."

Wildey watched his victim's face as he made this candid avowal, and he read there the torture which his words inflicted.

"Look here, Wildey!" said Mr. Cameron, at length, when he had sufficiently mastered his emotion to speak at all, "can you explain to me this note?"

He presented, as he spoke, the unfinished scrap, which had so wonderfully tended to obscure the clearness of his vision, and annihilate the generosity of his character.

Wildey looked at it, and gravely shook his head.

"That probably is not the first of a series of such correspondence, but it proves their good understanding," said he, with a sigh. "Oh, May, May, dreadful dishonour! Mr. Cameron, when I think that it is to me you owe this sad affliction, that she is my cousin, that my mouth proposed, my hand assisted to form this tie, I feel that I could blow out my brains with mortification and anger. Indeed, I am ashamed to look you in the face!"

"Don't, my dear fellow, don't distress your-

self; you are not to blame," said the merchant, kindly; "but tell me what to do. I cannot bear a great *fracas*, I will not have a dreadful noise and scandal made, that would kill me outright. I will remove her quietly from London, and send her to her uncle's, there to remain in obscurity. Will not that do, think you?"

"Why," said Wildey, a little perplexed, "my sister lives there, and—and—perhaps May might not like to stay there; she might run away if sent alone. Suppose you were to *take* her into the country yourself, there would be less scandal then; things may not be so bad, but that a reconciliation might be effected; only she cannot appear at present in the world; there is no necessity, perhaps, for an absolute separation!"

"I cannot live with her, Wildey."

"I am indeed sorry; but take her away yourself, Sir."

"No, I shall leave town till she is gone. I cannot meet her again!"

Wildey pondered a little. Would this an-

swer his purpose quite as well? he thought not. Desirable as it was instantly to rid himself of Mr. Cameron's *surveillance*, until Arnold's visit to town was at an end, and all fear of his threatened disclosures passed away, it would not answer the same purpose if the merchant merely absconded for a time, and then returned to keep residence without his wife. Things had better stay as they were, than that such a change should take place; for the immediate consequence of such a state of things would be, that Mr. Cameron would devote his time and energies as formerly to the care of his mercantile concerns; all Wildey's frauds, injustice, insolence, and mismanagement would instantly come to light, and ruin, irretrievable and complete, both in fortune and character, would be the conclusion of his hitherto prosperous career.

Moreover, not being blinded by the strong feelings which disturbed Mr. Cameron's reason, he saw more clearly than his patron how dangerous and uncertain was the scheme he proposed. It was not likely that the wife would

submit quietly to be cast off by the husband, unless she were far more culpable than he had the least idea she was. In his heart, he acquitted her of all but imprudence, which a little more judgment and experience would cure; and he believed her also to feel an affection for her husband, that would of course influence her to endeavour after a reconciliation, and prompt her to use every means to retrieve his good opinion. In this, he had no doubt, she would succeed; Mr. Cameron's attachment, his generous nature, and placable disposition, would make it easy for her to regain her former influence; and he, Wildey, would be the sacrifice; all would be explained between them, and his double-dealing would never be forgiven by either. Or if, on the contrary, May's affections were so alienated from her husband as to make her glad of the separation, in what a dangerous situation would *she* be placed; young, beautiful, lively, and with strong feelings, to leave her unprotected by a husband's care, whilst she was still fettered by the conjugal tie, would be to expose her to the greatest danger in the

cruellest way. Bad as he was, he could not calmly contemplate the ruin which would be the probable result of such an arrangement; supposing her to deserve, by her past conduct, any part of her husband's censure. Were she inclined to go astray, it would be exposing her to temptation, and were she innocent in heart, and in intention—it would be an unjust, an unmerited penance.

In contemplating the matter, however, another idea occurred to him, which seemed, in the dilemma where he found himself, to promise brighter hopes for the future. Suppose he were to arrange that Mr. Cameron should really leave London, apparently with the design of never returning; that *he* should be the depository of the merchant's purpose, and the only one aware of the place of his retreat. That, finding this, May should be forced to sue to him for information on the subject, that through him she should make overtures to her husband, that he should be the means of her restoration to happiness, and that during the negociations of which he was to be the

medium, he should find some opportunity of binding her by a fresh engagement to his cause, to prevent inquiry into his mismanagement, and to screen him from detection and disgrace. Only let him be the source to which she would owe a reconciliation with her husband, and a restoration to an unblemished character, and he must be a wretched bungler indeed if he could not so work on the gratitude of both as to secure himself from all evil.

Coolly calculating on the degree of pain which this new arrangement would occasion to both parties, and well knowing that the greater it was, the better was his prospect of indemnity, he turned to the merchant, who, after his last speech, had sunk into a profound fit of reflection, and inquired exactly what he proposed to do.

Mr. Cameron told him that it was his intention to leave London immediately, without taking any attendant, or communicating to any individual, except himself, the end or object of his journey; that he would write a letter

to May, explaining his intentions, and requiring of her to quit his house, and never enter it again; that on condition she would return into Lincolnshire, and reside in retirement with her uncle, he would allow her a sufficient income to enjoy every luxury attainable in the country; but that only on that condition should she have more than a bare maintenance, such as the law would enforce; he was not going to put additional temptation in her way, or enable her to live in guilty splendour anywhere. As to himself, he should return to his old home, his old habits, and his old occupations; the short remainder of his life should be devoted to what alone he was fit for, the cares of his business, and the duties of a merchant.

Wildey listened calmly, and he saw his way clearly before him. He assented to all these plans, and seemed to consider that nothing better could possibly be proposed.

Professing the most unbounded sorrow at the unfortunate turn which affairs had taken, and sympathizing to the fullest degree in his patron's sorrows, he yet admitted that he must

be the best judge of what was conducive to his own comfort and honour. As, however, it was not now his plan to exasperate Mr. Cameron against his wife, but rather to soften his feelings, and make the work of reconciliation as welcome to himself as to her, he artfully threw in a variety of allusions, tending to increase the sorrow he was affecting to assuage, and by calling up images of past happiness, to make his regret more poignant at the present reverse.

He was soon satisfied that they took sufficient effect; he saw that Mr. Cameron was at heart writhing under the separation from the wife on whom he really doted. He was certain that he would have given half his fortune to have been relieved from his mistrust of her, and that nothing now prevented his return to seek an explanation, but the fear of being laughed at as a slave to the caprices, and a helpless victim to the artifices of a young wife, who ruled where she ought to obey, and trifled alike with his honour and affection.

The letter, however, was written to May,

announcing to her Mr. Cameron's intention of an eternal separation, and in it was enclosed the note to Captain Mountsteven, which her husband considered to be so clear a proof of her dreadful hypocrisy towards himself, and her favour to his rival. This packet was to be sent up to the house in Hyde Park Gardens, in the course of the morning, and Mr. Cameron promising to write to his clerk by that evening's post, and to let him know where he stopped, and what he proposed to do, but at the same time exacting from him the most solemn promise not to make it known to any individual under the sun, without express permission from himself, sent for a cab and started for the Euston Square station, intending to proceed by the next train northwards, without having at all decided whether he should stop at Birmingham or travel further.

Wildey saw him go with exultation, and then sat himself down in the room where they had held their conference, to review his measures and decide on his plans. The game seemed now in his own hands. Arnold must

be quieted about Dunsford's character, and then persuaded to leave town ; then May must be visited, her grief assuaged, her cause taken up ; her confidence regained ; her affection for him re-kindled ; and his zealous endeavours for her welfare, to restore her husband, and save her character would be rewarded by an engagement to consign all past differences to oblivion, and to support him against any dangerous investigations, or unpleasant inquiries.

His first step now was to seek the Dunsfords, themselves, and being acquainted with their address, he set out, bent on conciliating them, even at a considerable expense. As he walked along, he arranged his plan of action, and before he arrived at their lodgings, he had quite decided what to do. He was rather glad to find that the wife was at home, and alone ; had he come ten minutes sooner, he would have found visitors there as unwelcome as unexpected, but Mrs. Cameron was gone when he reached the house, Mr. Arnold had taken her home, and Harry had gone out also.

Wildey sent up word that a gentleman

wished to speak to Mrs. Dunsford, on business, and he was shewn into a little back parlour, behind the shop, to wait for her; the slatternly girl who mounted guard in front, being moved to extraordinary speed and good-will by the bright half-crown the visitor placed in her hands.

Grace came down with some little surprise, at an incident so unexpected, and it was with a start of something between fear and horror that she recognised her visitor; the darkness of the little den where they met, and the unexpectedness of such a rencounter, had prevented her being aware of his identity, until he had closed the door behind her, as she advanced into the room: when she did perceive who he was, she stopped short, and exclaimed, "Mr. Wildey!"

"The same, Mrs. Dunsford—do not be alarmed, and pray sit down, I see you are unequal to standing." He tried to hand to her a chair as he spoke, with his best and most polished manners, but she seemed to shrink from his touch, and replied,

"Thank you, there is no occasion, you

cannot have anything to say to me, which I cannot stand to hear."

"I have much to say to you Mrs. Dunsford."

"Surely, you mistake Sir! what can you have to communicate to me?"

"Much—be seated I beg, and listen!"

She complied mechanically, keeping the table between them, a movement of which he was quite aware. A short pause followed, but at last he spoke.

"I do not wonder, Mrs. Dunsford, that you should regard me with abhorrence and aversion, naturally you must associate me with your misfortunes, and feel that I have been your enemy. Of the motives which lead me here, you must of course be ignorant; and you therefore listen to me with suspicion and mistrust. But I am come to make confession of errors, and to rectify mistakes; I therefore demand of your candour a patient hearing."

"Well, Sir, pray proceed with the business which brought you here," replied Grace, not quite convinced of his sincerity.

"I saw my brother-in-law this morning

with reference to your husband's affairs, and his expostulations have induced me to examine more closely into those particular circumstances which led to our disagreement. I confess I was wrong on that occasion; particular events, which I cannot now detail, gave me a prejudice against Dunsford, and I allowed this prejudice so far to blind my eyes as to induce me to judge unfairly as to his part in the blunders occurring in his office. You, Madam, who no doubt never were misled by prejudice, or any such weakness, will find it hard to excuse me; but such was the case. I was not wilfully unjust; but I was deceived by circumstances; my feelings, my passions are strong, and indignant at errors which I believed I discovered, I allowed myself to act too hastily. None could be better aware of the hundred good qualities of your husband than myself, but these I thought should not shield him from blame due to practical errors, which I believed to be the result of his neglect. Examination has proved me wrong, and I am now ready to own myself convinced of my fault. The

blunders from which it originated were owing to various causes, partly, perhaps, to that unfortunate failure of intellect, just then becoming apparent in Mr. Ashton, and which I understand has now shewn itself more decidedly. Altogether, however, I own with regret that I was actually unjust, and through my means, Mr. Cameron became so, too. It would, I have no doubt, be disagreeable to Mr. Dunsford to re-enter our house—or do you think he would like it?"

Grace gave, as her visitor expected and wished, a decided negative.

"I agree with you," continued he, "it would not be desirable; but Mr. Cameron's influence will be exerted to procure him such a situation as he deserves; has he any in view—I think I understood Arnold that he had?"

"Yes, it is settled with the heads of the house, and Mr. Dunsford enters their office next week."

"Oh, I am glad; I shall be most happy to be applied to for references!"

"It is unnecessary, Mr. Arnold became

guarantee for my husband's character, and as he is one of the partners in the firm, of course there was no difficulty."

"I am delighted to hear it. I assure you I am."

"Thank you—is that all?"

"No, Mrs. Dunsford, I have more to say; Mr. Cameron, on learning the unfortunate state to which your father is reduced, has desired me to assure you of his deep concern, and to inform you that as an old and valued servant of his house, he has settled on him an annuity of one hundred per annum, the first quarter of which being due last Christmas, and the next at Lady-day, I am commissioned to pay you down fifty pounds at once, to be applied to his use and comfort."

He laid the money on the table as he spoke; he did not think it necessary to say, that it was his own doing that the annuity had not been paid before; that he was refunding money he had unjustly retained, because he dared pursue the same system no longer. His candour did not go so far.

Grace looked at him, and looked at the money, with doubt and emotion.

"Did Mr. Cameron really," said she, then stopped; for the tears rushed to her eyes, and she could not quite command her voice.

"He did, it is a mere act of justice, well deserved; all he asks is, that you will not annoy him with thanks or acknowledgements, which would distress and disturb him."

"Mr. Cameron has a right to dictate his own terms for bestowing his kindness," replied she, "but it would have been a pleasure to have thanked him myself."

"That I can easily believe; a grateful heart feels burdened until it expresses its thanks; trust me, however, with your gratitude; I will make it known to your benefactor, at a suitable opportunity; at present, indeed, he has left town for an indefinite period, your thanks must of necessity be postponed."

"I may presume, then," said Grace, looking at the money which lay before her on the table, "that Mr. Cameron no longer feels any indignation against my father, that he acquits

him of all wilful errors, and believes him to have been always the faithful servant which ofr forty years he was supposed to be. I could not accept this money, even from Mr. Cameron, and for my father, unless it is accompanied by a restoration of his esteem: I am sure Mr. Dunsford would not; we would rather work for our bread and for his, we would rather suffer any privations than accept a pension from one who could misjudge and mistrust him. Under such circumstances, I might honour his kindness, but I would not accept his charity."

"Rightly and honourably spoken," replied Wildey, who secretly considered her a great fool if in her present difficulties she would hesitate to accept what she so much needed from any such absurd scruples; "I entirely approve your decision, but I assure you that Mr. Cameron is perfectly aware that not a shadow of blame rests on your husband or father. I had a long interview with him this morning: be satisfied on that topic. The unfortunate state of your poor father's mental

faculties, now so strongly developed, fully [redacted] acquits him of everything, except what he [redacted]e could not help, incapacity for business. This [redacted]s explains blunders, and accounts for inac[redacted] curacies; and when Mr. Cameron remember[redacted]s that it was in his service that his intellect[redacted]s were worn out, he says that he considers him[redacted]- self bound in common honesty to make some [redacted]e provision for his declining years. You wil[redacted]ll not, I am convinced, deny him this satisfaction [redacted], you will allow me to assure him that his wishe[redacted]s will be gratified in this particular."

In spite of the extreme gentleness, and con[redacted]- siderate tones of Wildey, in spite of his air o[redacted]f candour, his benevolent smile, and insinuating[redacted] manners, there was a something which con[redacted]- veyed to Grace's mind the idea of insincerity. She could not define the feeling, nor precisely account for it, but she could not trust him; she could not prove that his words were false, nor dared she assert that her father had betrayed no wandering of his mental faculties in business, previous to his dismissal from Mr. Cameron's employment; but her own con-

victions and her observations led her to a contrary conclusion, and she had always been persuaded that it was the shock and disappointment consequent on this dismissal, acting on a mind of course harrassed by long and devoted attention to business, and a body enfeebled by the approaches of old age, which had produced the illness resulting in a loss of his mental faculties.

She kept on asking herself also, why was all this said now; what motive had this man to seek them thus suddenly, and make these fair professions! he had ever been harsh, unjust, selfish, ambitious; he had, she knew, been lately leading a life of dissipation and immorality—was there no secret reason for this sudden change, might not some further danger lurk in the offers which he made, and the professions he so smilingly uttered.

Perhaps, her incredulity may be considered natural if not pardonable, when it is considered that Wildey's former offences had not been personal to herself, but against her husband and her father. As a woman, a wife, and a

daughter, it was not unreasonable that she should be suspicious of the man who had suspected them; or be inclined to doubt his judgment, who had doubted their honesty. Impressions unfavourable to him, had been too strongly and deeply graven, for a few smiles and fair words to efface them now: and with her utmost efforts not to bear malice, and her earnest endeavours to forgive past unkindness, she yet could not feel towards him the perfect confidence and unhesitating trust he hoped to inspire.

Unable to decide what would be best to do, she replied to his last speech after some consideration,

"I feel excessively obliged to Mr. Cameron for his kindness, and am deeply gratified that he acquits my father; but until I have seen and consulted with my husband, I really dare not say whether we can accept his bounty to my father. Mr. Dunsford will be better able to decide what course will be most conducive to his happiness, and if you will allow me, I will defer until then, my final answer."

"As you please," was his answer, "I fear

I have already trespassed greatly on your time; I will do so no more, allow me to wish you good morning; and I trust you will believe me, when I say, that you have not a sincerer well-wisher than myself, in spite of your painfully evident mistrust of me."

He quitted her with a bow, indicative of as much feeling as he could possibly throw into it, and she remained a moment, before rejoining her family to consider, that if he were really as sincere as he professed, and she had made her own doubts of him so evident, she must have greatly hurt his feelings, for which she was sorry.

He, on the contrary, walked away, pretty well satisfied with the result of his negociations. After what he had said, he had no fear that the Dunsfords, if they accepted the pension, would intrude their gratitude on Mr. Cameron; and he would not, therefore, learn that the payment of it had been so long withheld, for it ought to have been made at Christmas. Should they be proud and obstinate, so much the better for him; he could either continue to pocket the annuity, as he had always intended to do, or he could, if it seemed likely

to answer his purposes better, make it known to Mr. Cameron that they scorned his assistance, and would accept nothing from him.

At all events, there was now no danger of discovery or detection in that quarter; Arnold would be satisfied, and would, it was to be presumed, return to his wife in the country; he should be able to manage May's affairs as best suited his own plans, and he doubted not that he should remove her and her husband to a distance; then, safe from interference, he should be able to carry on the speculations on which he had set his heart; he should secure so large a fortune as to be able to cut the odious mercantile affairs, and become independent, and by and bye still brighter prospects might open upon him.

Elate with these visions, and full of the substantial benefits to himself which were so certainly to result from the present entanglement in Mr. Cameron's affairs, he returned to the house in the City, determining in the afternoon to go up to Hyde Park Gardens, see May, learn how she took her husband's departure, and, according as he found her penitent or proud, sorrowful, angry, or satisfied, so to

speak, and so to act, as to mould her to his purposes.

His opinion as to what she would think and feel, varied considerably at different times; sometimes he pictured her drowned in tears, and eagerly demanding from him the restoration of her husband and her character, ready to make any promises he might demand, or accede to any terms which he chose to affix to his interposition.

Then again, he would fancy her sullen and silent, preparing with scornful calmness, and contemptuous indifference to quit London, and return to the country, determined to make no overtures towards a reconciliation, and proudly repulsing alike his condolence and his confidence; leaving to her husband the task of making the first advances, and feeling certain that his affection would soon prompt him to return to her side.

Were this the case, he hardly knew how he should act, or in what way he could best secure his own advantage. To leave her to follow her own impulse would, perhaps, be wisest, and allow her to reflect in solitude and

MAY AND DECEMBER.

VOL. III.

MAY AND DECEMBER.

A TALE OF WEDDED LIFE.

BY MRS. HUBBACK,

AUTHOR OF

"THE WIFE'S SISTER; OR, THE FORBIDDEN MARRIAGE,"

&c. &c.

"Readers, the tale that I relate,
This lesson seems to carry,
Choose not alone a proper mate,
But proper time to marry."

COWPER.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

LONDON:

CHARLES J. SKEET, PUBLISHER,

10, KING WILLIAM STREET,

CHARING CROSS.

1854.

LONDON:
Printed by Schulze and Co., 13, Poland Street.

MAY AND DECEMBER.

CHAPTER I.

So from that spring whence comfort seem'd to come,
Discomfort swells.

MACBETH.

THE hour of confidence and communion with Grace Dunsford left May in a very different temper from that in which it found her. Irritation and peevish feelings at her husband's unexpected repulse had died away, and better sentiments had taken their place. It was impossible to continue discontented and ungrateful for her lot in life, with such an example as

Grace to study. What were her trials, compared to those of her friend, and how differently were they borne! What a pettish child she had been! she was ashamed of herself, and full of good resolutions, she prepared to go home with Mr. Arnold.

Little was said during their progress home, which was principally performed in a cab, but Arnold accompanied her into the house, and seated himself very deliberately in her boudoir. Evidently, he had not done with her yet.

"Well, Mrs. Cameron," said he, leaning his elbows on the table, and looking earnestly in her face, as he sat beside her in a large low *fauteuil*, "what do you think of it now?"

"Of what? of Grace, or of myself?" inquired she.

"Of both; let us hear your opinions, however, one at a time, not in a confused heap, as women usually utter them; so now for your sentiments, *à propos* to Grace, *bellissima Signora.*"

"I think," replied May, "that there are v

few women who, in her situation, would act as well as she has done, and none who could act better."

"*Bene;* then you consider her perfection. Now for yourself, May."

May fixed her eyes on him with a sorrowful expression, and after a moment's pause, she said:

"I acknowledge I have acted very ill, both towards her, and in other respects. If you only knew the remorse with which it fills me to think of that poor old man, and to reflect that I did not prevent the blow which shattered his intellect; oh, Mr. Arnold—"

She could not go on; she covered her face with her hands, and had some difficulty in stifling her sobs; she did not like to give way to them, because she fancied Arnold would particularly dislike violent emotion.

He was, however, much kinder than she had expected. He took her hand in a friendly way, and after a little pause, during which she struggled for composure, he said:

"I have taken a great fancy to you, Mrs.

Cameron, and feel as if you were my daughter. You must let me, therefore, speak to you as if you were one; you have been very wrong in many things, but you are young still, and have probably a lifetime before you to repair your errors. I am glad to see that you can exercise self-control, that you can repress all violent demonstrations of feeling; because, I know, that the energy which expends itself in sobs and screams is wasted for any good or practical purpose. Those do not feel most who give most vent to their feelings, and their feeling is generally for themselves alone; for I have noted those who were most addicted to convulsions of grief, and therefore piqued themselves on the depth of their sensibility, were precisely those who displayed most roughness and want of perception towards the feelings of others, and calmly accused of insensibility those who from principle perhaps were less demonstrative than themselves."

Mr. Arnold's speech had exactly the effect he intended; it gave May time to master her emotion, and the commendation he bestowed on her formed an additional in-

ducement for doing so. She was able to speak calmly.

"Tell me what I can do then, to repair my errors, and prove my amendment."

"Dunsford goes to the office in his new situation on Monday," replied Arnold; "his cares as tutor to the children must then cease."

He paused, and looked attentively at her.

"Ah, I see," cried May, after a moment's consideration, "George must go back to school, that will be easily managed; anything that money can do, is in my power!"

"Very well, and for the girls I have another plan; I know a clever girl, an orphan, with a very small independence, who wishes to live in a family where there are young people to teach, as a sort of exercise for her own mind, and a part compensation for her board. I think they would suit exactly, and Harriet Home would prove a valuable assistant to the cares of Grace Dunsford, and might, at the same time that she takes lessons from good masters for accomplishments, receive still more valuable ones,

from Grace, in temper, fortitude, and other good qualities."

"But, my dear Mr. Arnold, it would be impossible for them to receive an addition to their family, in their present shabby lodgings!"

"But, my dear Mrs. Cameron, I never for a moment thought of their doing so; as soon as Mrs. Dunsford recovers from her confinement—and I suppose we must wait till that is over—we will move them into a house out of London, on the Hampstead-road, or somewhere there. Dunsford's salary, will enable them once more to be comfortable; and as to Ashton, poor man! does it not strike you as a little strange that your husband, who valued him so highly, and whom he had served so long, should have discarded him entirely without any provision for his old age? Mr. Cameron's general kindness of heart, which is so invariably shown on other occasions, seems unaccountably to have failed here. What do you think of it?"

"I never thought about it before; but I can see now how deplorable his situation is;

and I am sure if Mr. Cameron knew it, he would afford him some assistance. Is that what you mean?"

"Not exactly; in speaking of the subject to my worthy brother-in-law, I alluded to this very topic, and though I did not quite say that I should make his case known to Mr. Cameron, I believe I implied something of the sort, which was received with an uncommonly bad grace by Wildey. He tried hard not to look confused, alarmed, or anything of the sort; but I have a sort of knack of reading people's thoughts in spite of themselves; and it is my conviction that he would very much dislike to have the subject brought under your husband's cognisance."

"Indeed! and for what reason?"

"There may be two reasons for his unwillingness; one, and the most innocent, may be his inveterate hatred of the Dunsfords, a hatred originating in the consciousness of having injured them; the other, perhaps, and the one I think most probable, is, that Mr. Cameron's good intentions have been counteracted by *his* interference, and that the pension intended to

make Ashton comfortable, has never reached him."

"How do you mean?"

"Why, suppose Mr. Cameron says to Wildey, 'I mean to settle an annuity on Ashton; you will see that so much a year is paid quarterly; and tell him it is for life.' Well, Wildey, perhaps, suggests that Mr. Cameron should tell him himself. 'No, no,' says the other, 'I want no thanks; you let him know it, and let no more be said.' Well, the money ought to pass through Wildey's hands to Ashton's; but somehow he shuts his hand on it, and it stays there; no one knows of it, and no one asks for it. Not such a very improbable contingency, after all. Eh, Mrs. Cameron?"

"Oh, Mr. Arnold, can you think James so dishonest?"

"Why, my dear, I am inclined to think that his *notions* of honesty and probity, if they are at all correct, do not agree with his actions. I am sorry to say it of him, but if he is not dishonest in this particular, he must be in some others. I suspect I know more of his pro-

ceedings than you do, or than you would like to hear; and his expenses, his extravagancies, in fact, are so much greater than his acknowledged income will account for, that he must be guilty of some considerable dishonesty somewhere."

"But perhaps he is only running in debt, and involving himself?"

"Well, and is not running in debt dishonest? Where is the difference between taking the goods of others, for which he knows he cannot pay, or taking the money of others to pay for those goods. Define if you can the moral difference between embezzling your husband's gold, or defrauding the tradesmen of their property. As to his only involving *himself*, that's impossible; he will involve many others, also!"

May was silent.

"I hope you do not think running in debt a trifle, Mrs. Cameron," pursued he; "I hope you do not add extravagance to your other faults; if you do, I have done with you!"

"No, indeed; I have never incurred debts of any kind."

"Well, so much the better. We shall soon see; if there really is anything in my suspicion, we shall find Wildey making restitution to hush up inquiry; if not, I think you must appeal to your husband's justice to do something for poor Ashton. I say, will you?"

"I will try!"

"No doubt you will succeed; I suppose you always have your own way?"

"Oh no, indeed," cried May, crimsoning as she spoke, "once I should have been sure of it, but to-day!—" she hesitated, and then paused entirely.

"Well, what of to-day? by the bye, that's the very thing I was going to ask about. Where is your husband, and what has passed between you this morning?"

"Nay, now; I do *not* think you have any right to inquire that," replied May.

"Something unpleasant, I know; and I must know what it is; because, otherwise, how can I be sure of what I am to do, or how far I may urge you wrong in this matter. You had much better tell me at once."

"No, indeed I cannot."

Just at this moment, they were interrupted by the entrance of a servant, who presented a letter to Mrs. Cameron. Having ascertained that no one waited for an answer, she laid it beside her, without examination, and turned again to her guest. But he desired her to look at her letter at once; how did she know, but that it was of great importance.

She obeyed him directly, and examining the seal before she broke it, she exclaimed with considerable surprise, and some alarm, that it was her husband's; what could he be writing to her for—where could he be—what new idea was this?

She tore open the envelope and unfolded the enclosure: a paper fell out, which she picked up and examined first; it was the fragment of the note which she had written to Captain Mountsteven; it perplexed her still more, but without waiting to consider, she hastily turned to the sheet of her husband's writing for some explanation of the mystery, and read as follows:—

"When you see by the enclosure that your

secret has been betrayed, you will perhaps, be prepared for what is to follow. I will not waste time in idle reproaches, or irritating representations; neither can I allow to you the opportunity for unavailing entreaties, or insincere protestations. Of the latter, I have had too much already, to the former, I will not listen; your crime is to me unpardonable, as you well know; may you seek, and obtain pardon from heaven, the pardon which is ever granted to penitents! A total separation is the only alternative; submit to this quietly, and I will spare your character from public exposure; you must return to your uncle's house, there you shall be provided with every indulgence which you can require; *but I will never see you more.* Ah, May, you have broken the heart of one who loved you better than all the world beside; and yet, when I remember the unsuitableness of our years and habits, I blame the foolish infatuation which made you my wife, rather than the weakness which now severs that tie; yes, the result has been as much the consequence of my folly, as of your guilt, and whilst I am constrained to banish you, I must forgive you still. It is the remembrance of

your hypocrisy which hurts me most; had you turned from me with cold indifference, I should have been less deeply wounded now. The happiest moments of a long life, were those, when I thought the wife on whom I fondly doted, loved me, with something like my own affection; and the bitterest pang I ever experienced, was the shock of discovering my mistake.

"Do not seek for me; no one knows where I am going, but I leave London in about an hour, and shall not return until you have left the house. Wildey alone knows my resolution, and he will assist you in such arrangements as you have to make.

"GEORGE CAMERON."

It must not be supposed that May read through this letter without emotion; her first astonishment when she discovered from whom it came, was nothing to that which she felt when she had perused the first dozen lines, and came to the words, "total separation:" she dropped the paper with a sort of shriek, and falling back in her chair, seemed struggling

with a deadly faintness. Mr. Arnold alarmed, started up, and snatching a bottle of essence from the table, sprinkled her face most copiously: in a few minutes she revived, raised herself, and seemed about to look again at the letter; he laid his hand on it, and said, "you are too much agitated, let me read it to you; something terrible has happened, I fear."

"No, no," cried May, snatching it from him, "I must read it myself, stay, I will read it aloud, and you shall see the justice, the kindness with which I meet, listen!" and then she began again, and read it through with a steady voice, and almost a smile of scorn upon her lip, for her pride was roused, and she nerved herself to bear this blow with stoic indifference. Her voice faltered a little as she uttered the words which marked her husband's tender love for her; but she got through it all without a pause, without a sigh, without a tear; then, when she had concluded it, she laid it on the table under her hand, and drawing herself up whilst her bosom quivered with violent emotion, she turned to her companion and said,

"And what do you think of the man who can so address me, so behave to me?"

"I think," replied Arnold, "that he is under some strong delusion, partly deriving its source from circumstances, partly from Wildey's insinuations perhaps, and still more from your own former imprudence, hastiness, or carelessness."

"Thank you, so I am to be blamed on all sides; I thought you knew me better!"

"I do, I did not say I believed you guilty," replied he, with emphasis.

"No!" said she, with crimson cheeks, "or it would be the last word you would say to me."

"And what do you intend to do Mrs. Cameron?"

"Return instantly to Littlemere; do you suppose I would stay another day in the house of the man who disowns me as his wife."

"Without making an effort at explanation, reconciliation, restoration to his good opinion?"

"Yes; in obedience to his will and pleasure, you see he forbids my attempting anything of

the sort, he scorns to listen to me; nay, he refuses to believe me."

"So he does; indeed, he puts it out of your power to reply to him, since he does not say where he is going. Probably Wildey knows, however."

"Perhaps!"

"And you might persuade or bribe him to tell you. Could you not influence him; he loved you well once; and if I do not mistake, he still retains some affection for you; seek him for restoration to your husband's favour; try your power there!"

May's brow grew dark, and her eyes flashed, whilst the glow of passion burned in her cheek. "And do you think I would sue to that wretch?" exclaimed she, "do you think I would put myself in his power, or accept an obligation from his hand? What bribe could I offer to one, who from a rejected lover, has grown into a triumphant and cruel enemy; what bribe would he accept, to cease his persecution? The very thought is abhorrent."

"But your character, Mrs. Cameron, consider that; banishment from your husband's house,

seclusion from society, burial alive; to submit tamely to this, is it not, to confess yourself in the category of those unfortunates, to whom such a punishment was reserved?"

"I do not care in the least, let the world tear my reputation to pieces, they cannot make me guilty. Heaven knows I am culpable of nothing but folly, far, far more profound, than that of which Mr. Cameron accuses himself. But my crime is one on which the world looks lightly, and that I have only been guilty of forming a purely mercenary marriage, must eventually appear. Meantime, I shall not hear their censures, and if they torment any one, it will be him, who so relentlessly drives me out. Captain Mountsteven, indeed! but he is a man of honour, and he knows how to do me justice. He knows, that except at evening parties to which I went without Mr. Cameron, I *never* met him except in my husband's presence. I would far rather appeal to his justice, than to Wildey's compassion, and make *him* clear my character, to my husband, and the world."

"You are mad, Mrs. Cameron, positively

insane," ejaculated Arnold, abruptly: "do you not know that the attempt to clear a woman's character always leaves an irremediable stain, it is like wiping a dulled mirror with a soiled cloth, each effort leaves a trace behind it. Talk of appealing to any young dandy's sense of justice indeed!"

"Be it so then, what do I care—secure in my own innocence, the world's censure will be indifferent to me. And if you are afraid of your wife's being injured by my society, Mr. Arnold, take her away from Littlemere, my uncle will not cast me out, and there I shall be at peace."

"No, I shall not mind at all, we shall be very glad of your society, and Mrs. Arnold especially will be thankful for the change, if you will not always look quite so fierce as you do now, or she will be more frightened than pleased at the prospect."

"How can you jest under such circumstances; I had not thought you so unfeeling?"

"I beg your pardon;—well, what steps *do* you intend to take?"

"Ring the bell, and you shall see, that bell, on the left hand, if you please."

The summons produced Mrs. Cameron's own maid, to whom she gave hasty directions for packing up all necessary articles, ascertaining the hour when the next train left King's Cross, and ordering the carriage to take her there; then she added positive injunctions not to put up anything new or fashionable in her wardrobe; she was going into the country, and must have her plainest dresses, not a single useless article, no ornaments or jewels of any kind. The waiting-woman stared at these orders, and at the tone and manner in which they were delivered, and then withdrew to obey them.

"Very well," said Arnold, "take your own course, I will not interfere to prevent you; you would not tell me just now what passed between your husband and you this morning, you only treat me with a demi-semi-confidence; do as you please, and abide the consequences."

"Ah, you are unjust, I have entire confidence in your kindness; and as to what occurred this

morning, why should I hesitate to tell you, when this so far surpasses it. It was regard for my husband kept me silent, but now you may know all. Your remonstrances and my own reflections had convinced me that I had not been always all that a wife should be; and resolved to repair this fault, to be more patient, loving, confiding, dutiful, I sought my husband to explain to him the past, especially the affairs of yesterday, and to establish a perfect understanding between us. For the first time since we married, he was unkind, even uncivil in his manners; he expressed himself desirous to avoid my society, and doubtful of my sincerity. I left him in anger, and am never to see him again."

"A very pretty way, upon my honour, of shewing your patience, love, confidence, and duty. The first time he speaks a hasty word to you, which it was evident was done under extreme provocation, you deign to ask no explanation, you make no attempt to soften him; you neither humble yourself as an offender, nor shew sorrow as an affectionate and dutiful wife would do, when she meets blame, however

unjust. You left him in anger, and as you observe, you are never going to see him again."

May bent down her eyes, and the tears trembled on her eyelashes, but she did not reply.

"Now listen to me, May, and I will speak to you once more as my daughter. If you are angry, I renounce you for ever, but if you bear with me patiently, come what will, I will stand your friend."

"Go on!" murmured she, without raising her eyes.

"Your conduct with regard to your marriage, we reviewed last night, no need to enter minutely on that again; in the present unfortunate predicament in which you are placed, we may observe three things particularly; your untidy habits, your thoughtless imprudence, and your susceptibility of temper; it is these which have armed your enemies against you. Had you closed your writing-desk when you went out so hastily, this paper would not have fallen into your husband's hands. This was the result of disorder and hurry, always in-

dicative of an ill-regulated mind. Had you consulted the dictates of prudence, instead of precipitation, this letter would never have been written at all. You would never have addressed a young man under such circumstances, you would not, having summoned your husband home, have gone out without seeing him, or taken the steps which you did yesterday, without his sanction; a small degree of reflection would have induced you at least to have left an explanation of your absence when he arrived, and even had this note been there, two words would have let him into its meaning. Had not your evil, hasty temper prompted you, this morning, you would not have left his presence without an explanation: what availed your resolutions of amendment, if in the first moment of trial your temper failed? It is easy to be patient, when there is nothing to provoke us, it is extremely amiable no doubt to meet forbearance and kindness with a good grace, not to return a smile with a frown, or an affectionate word with a rebuff. This is in your opinion, the duty of a wife, the sum total of what is required of you. Ask

your own heart, ask your past experience, whether a mild, humble, affectionate appeal to your husband's sense of justice, and his love for you, would not have obtained at once all you could have wished. You know it would; who then is to blame for the present blunders, the misunderstanding which threatens to result in loss of character to yourself, and loss of domestic happiness to your husband?"

"I see," said May, softly; her tears were flowing now, she was moved and humbled by his words, "I am the one to blame; only tell me, Mr. Arnold what I ought to do?"

"Good girl," said he again taking her hand, and patting it, as grown people often do to little children, "neither your happiness nor your character shall suffer if I can help you."

"But, what *am* I to do?" continued she, "shall I go home?"

"Oh yes, certainly, Mr. Cameron orders it, and as he has determined not to come back till you are gone, the best thing will be to clear the coast for him as speedily as possible; for the sooner he returns, the less chance there is of this little *escapade* being heard of, and the

sooner we shall be able to establish a direct communication with him, without the intervention of Wildey."

"And do you suppose," said May, with a faint smile, "that Mr. Cameron will ever forgive me?"

"I am inclined to think," replied Arnold, "that you are by no means the first couple who, having parted never to meet again, speedily agree to forget the past, and live happily together ever after. When Mr. Cameron finds his jealousy was unfounded, and understands that you are not only reasonably fond of him, but very much prefer living with him to living without him, he will forgive himself for being so much older, and not insist on doing penance in a separate establishment ever after. The only thing is to settle how to get his ear without employing your good cousin as a go-between."

At this moment, the waiting-woman entered again to tell her mistress that the next train started at half-past two, that it was then a little past one, and she did not think Mrs. Cameron could possibly be ready in time, but

that there was another train about four, which would do much better for everything, if her mistress pleased.

"Don't go till four," said Arnold, "it would not do earlier, and you would then get to Boston by eight. If you did not like to go on the same night, you could sleep there, and go on next morning at your leisure."

"Very well," replied May, acquiescingly.

"Will you be pleased to want me to attend on you?" demanded the maid.

"Of course," again interposed Mr. Arnold, "you do not suppose your lady is going to travel alone; what would Mr. Cameron say to that? You and her footman will have to go down with her, and you know, Mrs. Cameron," turning to her, "you can send the man back again, as we shall not want his services at Littlemere."

"As you please," replied May, again.

"That will do," continued Arnold, to the woman, who disappeared on the hint.

"Now," said he, "I must go too!"

"Why? What shall I do without you?"

May seemed depressed, overpowered, and unequal to exert herself.

"Do! do nothing; lie down on the sofa, and take a nap to rest yourself; or you will be quite knocked up. I am going first to see Grace Dunsford, to let her know that I shall drink tea with her this evening, as I have much to talk over with them; and then on to Wildey's, to discover what he knows of this affair, and if possible find out where Mr. Cameron is gone. Then I will come back to you, with the result of my mission; and if you please, accompany you to King's Cross, and see you safe into the railway; don't wait, however, for if I am not able to be here in time, I will meet you at the station. I must now be off without delay!" Accordingly, he hurried away after receiving an earnest injunction from May to tell Grace all, and Wildey nothing of what had happened, where she was going, or anything concerning herself.

He found Mrs. Dunsford very eager to inform him of Wildey's visit, and the circumstance of Mr. Cameron's liberality; she dwelt

a good deal on the kind professions of her recent visitor, his acknowledgment of error, and his wish to make compensation; and she added the announcement that Mr. Cameron had left London, for some days, though Wildey had not mentioned where he was gone.

Arnold did not then stop either to explain or to comment on these circumstances, but promising to come again in the evening, when he should have much to tell, he proceeded at once to Mr. Cameron's counting-house. Here he had the good luck to meet with Wildey, who appeared trying to look glad to see him.

"I really must apologize," said Arnold, with most unusual suavity, "for again intruding on you; but in such an affair as recommending a clerk to a confidential situation, you must feel that it is of great importance to be sure of one's ground. Now, Dunsford is just the fellow we want, if it could only be made out that his honesty is equal to his abilities, and having come all the way from Lincolnshire to see about it, I should be a goose to go back without good testimonials; so come now, honestly, Wildey,

do you know anything against his character?"

"No," said the other, "I do not. There were gross blunders made, but it was the fault of the old dotard, his father-in-law. I am extremely glad Dunsford has got a place to suit him. I called on his wife just now to say that I would answer any references to me, and also on another piece of business. In consequence of your statement, as to Ashton's misfortunes, I mentioned the matter to Mr. Cameron. He has most generously desired that a regular annuity shall be paid him for his life; not likely to be a long one; and I paid down the two first quarters to Mrs. Dunsford this morning; so you see, their affairs are settled, and need detain you no longer from your home. I suppose you will return to my sister immediately!"

"Almost; I rather want to see Mr. Cameron himself; he was not at home when I inquired for him, do you know where he is, and when he will be in?"

"Mr. Cameron is out of town at present,"

replied Wildey, rejoicing in the certainty that a meeting was impossible.

"Out of town, not gone far, I presume! I really must see him; tell me where he is, and I will follow him."

"Out of the question, Arnold; I do not know where he is myself!"

"Very strange, what did he go for?"

"Oh, for private reasons; I do not know when he will come back, but I expect to hear to-morrow morning."

"And Mrs. Cameron, is she to go *with* him, or *to* him?"

"Neither, I shall see Mrs. Cameron, myself, this evening on the subject; but *she* does not know where her husband is gone!"

"Extraordinary! you will let her know, I presume; or no! of course, Mr. Cameron will write to her, too!"

"I happen to know that he will not! it is only to me that he will address himself, and only through me that he will be addressed."

"Ah!—then I must trust to you to forward my correspondence."

"Certainly, unless he should not wish

to be worried with letters, which is probable."

"Ah!"

"In which case, you know I must attend to his wishes."

"Ay!"

"However, if you will leave your papers with me, I will take the first opportunity of placing them in his hands; so you need not stay in town, Arnold."

"Much obliged."

"Trust to me, Arnold, you may trust to my zeal, I assure you; your wishes shall be attended to, my sister's husband may rely on me!"

"Ah!" again ejaculated the sister's husband, in the same calm deep tone; with so little emotion or emphasis, as to leave his hearer quite in doubt as to his feelings.

"We understand each other," continued Wildey, anxiously, desirous of drawing some sentiment from his companion.

"Perfectly," was Arnold's answer, "and now I must wish you good morning," and he abruptly quitted the room as he spoke. "My

kindest love to my sister," were Wildey's last words.

He returned to Hyde Park Gardens as quickly as possible, and arrived in very good time to escort May to the railroad.

"I do not exactly understand what that excellent brother-in-law of mine is about," said he, as they drove along; "he has made up all differences with the Dunsfords, paid down fifty pounds to Grace, as the first half year of an annuity, which he says your husband has settled on Ashton this very morning; and volunteers a visit to clear Harry's character. Then he is profusely civil to me, and so affectionate to my wife, that he wants me to hurry home at once for fear, I suppose, that she should be lonely. I believe that he really does not know where Mr. Cameron is gone, but he expects to hear to-morrow, and promises to let you know also, which by the way I do not credit. He has not the least notion, however, that you will leave home, but as he must know all about that letter, from what your husband said, I presume he thinks you will battle it out

with Mr. Cameron, and employ him as a go-between."

"Perhaps, but I will have no communication with him. Tell him to-morrow to inform Mr. Cameron that I have obeyed his wishes, and that he can return home when he pleases!"

"And I will find out immediately that occurs, and let you know."

"Thank you; but I hardly know if I should address him or not; perhaps I had better wait to time or circumstances to clear my character to him."

"Think about it, when you are safe at Littlemere, Mrs. Cameron, consider deeply; ask your conscience what you ought to do, and then do it. You are too much harassed and worn out to decide on any line of conduct now."

"I do feel exhausted in mind," replied May, with a deep sigh.

"Well, trust to me, for doing anything I can do; and trust to your husband's real goodness and kindness of heart to render you justice in the end."

No more was said, until they reached the railway; there they parted, and Mr. Arnold having seen May safely off, returned to his hotel to reflect on his plans, eat his dinner, and then adjourn to the Dunsfords to pass the evening.

CHAPTER II.

But tell me true,
For I must ever doubt, though ne'er so sure,
Is not thy kindness subtle, covetous?

SHAKESPEARE.

"I CERTAINLY am a lucky fellow," thought Wildey, as he watched his brother-in-law's broad figure slouch out of the room, and heard his heavy step retreating in the distance, "all my most hazardous speculations turn out successfully. Not that it is altogether luck alone; for nine people out of ten would have blundered in these last moves, and would have got themselves into a precious scrape. Who would

have thought of Arnold stepping forth as the patron of the Dunsfords, and bringing them up again just as I had got their heads under water; and who but myself would have so boldly ventured on the game I have played? To be sure it costs me a good hundred a-year, but it is well worth it; and though I would rather have an advantage for nothing, still I do not mind paying a fair price when that must be done, and so it is now. The Dunsfords disposed of, and Arnold out of town, I trust neither of them will cross my path again; then there is Mrs. Cameron now in my power; ah, proud and pretty cousin, disdainful beauty, tormenting and scornful as you have been, you must come to terms now! Husband and household, character and standing in the world, all are mine now, to give, or to withhold; and not for nothing will I give them, May! Yes, I think I see you, suppliant to me, begging of me for the love I once bore you, to save you from the dreary prison of Lincolnshire; I think I see your bright eyes all swimming in tears, and your hands, perhaps, clasping mine, as you entreat mercy of

me; ay and sternly I will refuse to interfere; or sadly declare my conviction that it is hopeless; and highly you shall bribe me, ere I stir one finger in your cause!

"It is delicious to think of her, trembling and weeping, deserted by her husband, and forced to depend on me for protection and succour. Her proud spirit, which rebelled against the bonds of her former promise, will have to submit itself to far more now. I will save her character to-day, and restore her to her place in society, but it shall be on terms to make her mine hereafter No more defiance or rebellion; she shall no. dare to flutter in the web with which I shall ensnare her; my slave, my captive!"

With such dreams as these, did Wildey amuse himself, until the hour when he thought it advisable to present himself to Mrs. Cameron; then, with a mind carefully running over all the soft insidious speeches, which he thought necessary on the occasion, and busy deciding how much reproach he should mix with his tender commiseration, and sympathizing condolences, he drove up to Hyde Park Gardens, never for a moment doubting that he should

find his cousin there; or entertaining any other idea than that she would be completely at his mercy.

In proportion to his confidence, was his surprise, on finding himself denied admission; Mrs. Cameron was not at home. Such was the answer to his summons. At first, he did not believe that she was out, and concluded that in her distress she had given orders to deny herself to visitors; but on himself questioning the porter, he still obtained the same answer, that she was not at home.

"Where is she gone?" impatiently demanded he.

But this was no part of the porter's business to know, and he was much too diplomatic to venture an opinion on any important point beyond his province. Nor could he be induced to declare what his own convictions were as to the period of her return. All he knew was that she had driven out, and beyond this simple fact, his mind seemed a blank, for his duty required no more of him until such time as her return would authorize another answer. Wildey might as well have consulted the hall-

clock with reference to the state of the nation, or demanded the hour of the barometer beside it, as have sought for further information from the stately porter of the mansion. Not even a golden fee for the trouble he had given by his questions, could win for the inquirer the desired intelligence, and seeing that this powerful engine failed to operate successfully on the memory of the individual with whose hand it was placed *en rapport*, Wildey not unnaturally concluded that he really did not know, and consequently he withdrew disappointed, with the intention to return again.

How the worthy porter laughed when he had baffled him thus; and how he chuckled as he told the butler that *that* sneaking fellow, the clerk, had come there to try and fish out where Mrs. Cameron was gone, and had got nothing from him, either good or bad, Wildey did not know, and little guessed.

Mrs. Cameron had desired they would not talk of her departure; and there was not one of her household who was not ready to do the bidding of their kind and gracious mistress; and though none knew exactly where or why

she had gone, they knew that she had taken her attendants with her into the country; and they guessed reasonably enough that she was gone to her old home; the prevalent idea being that some one of her family was ill.

Wildey retired discomfitted, and resolved on addressing a letter to his cousin, which he hoped would bring about an interview.

"I know what has passed," he wrote, "you need not therefore exclude me from your confidence, nor need you, my beloved cousin, shut yourself up in silent despair. Your misfortunes are not irremediable, if you trust to me, fully and entirely. I alone can negociate for you; to me your husband has confided you; I demand and entreat therefore to see you. As agent for your husband, and as your own most attached friend, I require with authority, and I entreat with affectionate humility. Do not increase your difficulties, by excluding from your council, the only one whose perfect knowledge of the whole can make his advice of value, and the one whose sincere affection, long-tried, disregarded and slighted as it has been, makes him hasten to offer his assistance.

"From the brink of the precipice where events have placed you, I can and will rescue you, if you will only listen to my advice, and act on my counsel.

"Yours ever,

"With most cousinly devotion,

"JAMES WILDEY."

Having written this note in the nearest stationer's shop, he returned, and left it at the door; entreating the porter to be sure it was given to Mrs. Cameron the instant of her return home; a promise which the dignitary of the hall readily made.

As he retreated towards his city home, for his mind was too uneasy from late events, to make society agreeable, and he felt no inclination to shew himself to the fashionable world, after the *fracas* of the duel, he puzzled himself unsuccessfully to account for May's absence at this time. The idea of her having actually left home so suddenly, never occurred to him, and he was rather surprised that she should have driven out at all at a time when he had concluded she would be drowned in

tears at home, but he could not suppose she had gone for amusement only. The former uncertainty as to how she would act under her husband's censure, returned to his mind, and he again vacillated in fancy, between visions of her desponding and wretched, or angry and disdainful; breaking her heart at her husband's absence, or defying his authority.

His doubts so fully occupied his mind, that he could hardly fix his thoughts on some papers of importance which he was trying at the same time to comprehend; and at length, unable to rest in this uncertainty, he again set out, late in the evening, for his cousin's residence, presuming that by this time, she must have returned, and resolved to see her.

Of course, he was equally unsuccessful in this attempt as in the former one; he obtained no further information; he was forced after all to retire in a state of harassing doubt, for though he began to suspect that May had really fled from London, he had no clue as to whither she was gone, when she went, or with whom.

Three different theories as to her flight

agitated him, had she gone in pursuit of her husband; had she retired to Littlemere, or had she really eloped on some scheme of her own? It was now too late at night for him to do anything in the way of tracing her, or endeavouring to ascertain in which direction she had gone; to-morrow he might perhaps be able to succeed in this; but now, owing to the imperturbable and impenetrable gravity of that porter, he had no clue to guide him. "Detestable man," thought he, "had he only said at first, she was gone on a journey, I should have known what to do, and, without doubt could have ascertained from some of the household the end and object of that journey; they would not all have been so dull or so taciturn as he, nor should I have scrupled to use bribery to a considerable amount to win from some accommodating individual the secret of their lady's movements."

Wildey suddenly remembered as he was sitting in his room deeply considering the mystery which perplexed him, that last night he had seen Arnold in her company, and the notion struck him, that perhaps, he knew something

of her proceedings. His first plan, next morning, should be to seek him, and try to ascertain this point; the post would bring him Mr. Cameron's address, and the possession of this would be reason enough for an interview with his brother-in-law, considering what he had said yesterday; and doubtless he should be able dexterously to ascertain from him, without evincing his own ignorance, whether Arnold himself was better informed on the subject of Mrs. Cameron's plans.

After all, it appeared, that he was not so certain of being the arbiter in this affair as he had hoped, events which he had calculated on, and which were to place all in his hands, did not occur; feelings he had depended on seeing laid bare, and over which he had fancied he was to have supreme control, were concealed from him; he had set a spring in motion which he had hoped to guide, but suppose it were altogether to escape his management, or pass into some other hands, what then would become of himself and his manifold schemes? This would never do! he must at any hazard, retain

the guidance he had originally assumed, for losing that, he would lose all.

Wildey was not often nervous, but the morning which was to bring him Mr. Cameron's letter, saw him more excited than he had ever been before; he could scarcely command his impatience, as he sat sipping his coffee, and trying to eat his breakfast; he really had no appetite, so intense was his anxiety; the postman's knock was at length heard, in the neighbourhood, and presently a clerk entered the room with a whole handful of letters. A large number were for the mercantile house: these he tossed over impatiently, there might be half a dozen or more exclusively for himself; and the superscriptions were eagerly examined, before each was hastily torn open, read through, or thrown aside with a "pshaw," or a still more irreverent ejaculation. There were unpaid bills and complaints of inattention, and announcements of the unfavorable results of certain speculations on his part, and excuses from some men whom he had expected to dinner—in short, every one of his

letters seemed to be disagreeable, and the one he had especially expected, the letter from Mr. Cameron, was not amongst them.

"This is too much!" cried he, impatiently, pushing away the heap of papers, and jumping up, "too bad a great deal—not a single line to tell me where he is gone—nor what he is going to do—and May gone also, no one knows where—and here it is Saturday morning, and no post to-morrow, and so if I get a letter on Monday, I shall not be able to let him know till Tuesday, that she is off. What can have come over this affair, which promised so well at first, and now goes all wrong? What am I to do; or what am I to expect next? Who knows but that the whimsical old idiot, on whose folly I depended, may take a new turn, and before I have time to look round, he may be down upon me in the office. A pretty mess I shall be in then; with all these letters, and these detestable complaints pouring into my ears daily. What is it makes those words of my old grandmother keep ringing in my head; 'as you make your bed—' nonsense, I say I will *not* lie on it, at least, until I have made it

more to my fancy than at present. Plague take those odious bills, I can't pay them now, since that railroad has turned out a failure; I have no money at command now, unless—and really I have dipped so deeply lately into old Cameron's, that if I cannot make a more successful hit somewhere, I shall be done completely. But one affair at a time; if I can only arrange the matters of this most provoking couple, I shall have time enough to settle about the money. Of all the straight-forward, matter-of-fact, well-meaning, correct simpletons in the world, I thought this old man the one easiest to manage; and I really imagined I had the whole scheme under my control; but somehow these down-right, determined-to-be-good; and act-on-principle men are, after all, far more difficult to keep to a point than others less scrupulous; one has less hold on them; less means of influencing them; reasons which go far where interest guides, have no chance with those who think they have a conscience. I used to consider it all fudge once, to talk of principle, but to do old Cameron justice, I really believe he acts more from that than any other motive, and,

upon my soul, I almost think he is right after all. Too late now to think of that for me; I have taken rather a distinct line in an opposite direction; though if anybody would make it worth my while, I would act on principle to-morrow. Then as to that cousin of mine, May gives me more trouble than—no, not than she's worth; there I must think her husband a dolt; and she so fond of him, all the time, I only wish she liked me half so well; but she *is* so hard to manage, it would be about as safe to light lucifer-matches in a powder-magazine, as to try to govern her by force; and as to knowing what she will say or do next, I might as well pretend to take a lunar observation. I wonder why I ever put my foot in it, I wish I had left her at Littlemere; but then there is never the slightest chance of knowing what a married woman will turn out, from seeing her as a girl; if they all wore masks, or went about veiled, we should know more of their faces, than we ever can discover of their minds. Except in cunning or skill, I do not know that there is much difference between one wife and another; it all depends on who holds the

reins, and certainly May has done that pretty decidedly, ever since she married. If she were my wife, I would manage her though; I do not think any woman could govern me, and I would soon tame her; but now, what am I to do? I suppose I must find Arnold, and learn from him where Mrs. Cameron is, and then—wait and see what turns up, ready to make the best of it!"

Accordingly, he proceeded to Arnold's lodgings, and found that he was not at home; he returned to the counting-house, and learned that his brother-in-law had been there during his absence; he then started off for Mr. Cameron's residence in the faint hopes of hearing something there of one or the other of the missing couple. With this view, he inquired whether Mrs. Cameron's letters had been forwarded to her, and was informed that Mr. Arnold had been there that morning, and had taken them away to post himself; Mrs. Cameron having given directions that they should be entrusted to him.

Wildey eagerly inquired what address had been put on them; but nobody could answer

this question; Mr. Arnold had taken good care that they should not.

"At all events, then, Arnold knows where she is, and I will know, too;" thought Wildey, "if I can but catch him; but of all the people in the world, who would have thought of his being chosen by her to confide in; she certainly has the queerest notions! and of all the unfortunate things which could happen to cross my plans, the worst, and most unlucky will be his getting a finger in this matter. There is no doing anything with that fellow: no puzzling him, no provoking him, and a man who never loses his temper is the worst antagonist one can have. I wonder whether he wants anything in the world which I could do for him; though I have a notion that if he did, he would scarcely take the trouble to be grateful, and perhaps would never remember that one good turn deserves another; those dogged independent ways of his are so very provoking. I suppose it would hardly go down either if I were to take up the fraternal line, and make believe to be alarmed for my sister's happiness, and suspicious of his intimacy with May; I dare say he would

not attend to me, and as to interfering with his management of his wife, I don't think it would be quite safe to try the experiment. I should just like to know how much I *could* do, how far I *could* go without making Arnold knock me down, but I don't intend to try for all that. Well, I shall write and ask for an interview; I I cannot go dancing after him all over London; he may settle the time himself, but I must see him somehow."

As it happened that Arnold was quite as anxious for a meeting as Wildey himself; he answered the note which the latter despatched to him, by a personal appearance at the counting-house, and interrupted his brother-in-law in the midst of some abstruse calculations, relative to his late losses in the railway-market. His entrance indeed was so abrupt, and yet so quiet, that before Wildey had time to shuffle his papers out of sight, his quick eyes had ascertained their nature, and certified to himself, what he had all along suspected, that his amiable brother-in-law dabbled in more things that did not properly belong to his station, than the domestic disagreements of Mr. and Mrs.

Cameron; and strongly confirmed a previously-formed idea, that he was speculating with other parts of the merchant's property, besides his conjugal happiness.

As he made no remark, however, Wildey hoped that these things had escaped his observation; and whilst rapidly, and somewhat incoherently expressing his pleasure at his visitor's entrance, and shaking him warmly with one hand, with the other he swept away into a heap, the documents he had been examining, and having cleared a space on the table, and placed doubtful papers out of reach, he requested him to be seated, with which Arnold at once complied.

A short silence ensued; the clerk wanted his visitor to speak first, or, if he would not do that, he at least wished to escape the fixed stare of those pale blue eyes, which seemed, by a secret influence, always to put Wildey out of countenance, and send his whole phalanx of thoughts scattering in every direction, leaving him utterly at a loss what to do or say.

It was too bad, that that great awkward man, with his dull face, and unpolished air, and inelegant style of dress, should presume to sit there scrutinizing the handsome-featured and fashionable-looking Wildey, whilst he made him shrink more and more into himself, and feel smaller and smaller under his cold glance, until, in the desperation of the sufferer's feelings, he was compelled to speak.

"I was sorry I missed you, Arnold, this morning; you were out when I called, and I was absent when you came here: quite unlucky!"

"We have met now," observed Arnold, making no response to Wildey's friendly smile.

"True, most true. I suppose you had something you wanted to say to me, eh—Arnold?"

"I merely wanted to ask Mr. Cameron's address; I was in no hurry!" replied Arnold, in a tone which implied considerable indifference on the subject.

"I did not hear from Mr. Cameron, as I

expected, this morning," said Wildey, trying to look at his companion; but his eyes seemed unequal to the exertion, and again his glance sank on the ground.

"Then you do not know where he is, either?" observed the other, relentlessly staring at the clerk with his fascinating gaze.

"No, indeed, which is particularly unlucky, and most strange. In a man of business-like habits like my principal, to go away and leave important affairs unsettled is very extraordinary. Those papers," glancing as he spoke to the documents he had just put aside, and desirous of deceiving Arnold as to their nature, "it is of great importance that he should see them, and now I do not know what to do, and there will be two days post lost at least. Really, it is most provoking!"

"I should not wonder if he were to return to-day," suggested Arnold, "his not writing looks as if he intended it; and you will probably have him walking into this room some time this forenoon; a man who speculates so largely in railway-shares, as those papers indicate, must be too anxious for the result, in these

ticklish times, to bear to be long absent. I wonder, however, Mr. Cameron has not more sense than to try such dangerous risks; with his large fortune, what business has he in the market? I only hope his wife's money is secure, for, depend upon it, it's a losing game to play, for honest men. I should tell him so, if I saw him."

As he spoke, the pale eyes were fixed on Wildey's face, with a look more blank and cold than ever. The clerk turned white at his words.

"Not for the world—that is—I mean you had better not; it would not do to mention the subject to him—he is so particular—it would do harm—annoy him—he does not like strangers to meddle in his affairs."

"Pooh, pooh! it would be no meddling, to say what I think of gambling; and as to annoying him, one would not mind that to save a man from ruin. I shall certainly favour him with my advice."

"If you have any regard for me," cried Wildey, in desperation, "I must entreat you not do so; he would never forgive my having allowed

you to know it. He would consider it a breach of trust, on my part. It would be my ruin—I should lose my situation! I implore you to make no allusion to it, unless you wish to blast my prospects in life."

"Ah!" said Arnold, and made no other answer.

Wildey sat looking agitated and alarmed, waiting for something else to follow, afraid of saying either too much or too little on the occasion. He could not tell, by the furtive glances which alone he dared to cast at his visitor, whether he really suspected the true state of the case, or whether he spoke his whole mind. He felt much inclined to tell him all, and bribe him to silence with half the profits expected from his last bargain; but he feared his secresy might not be purchasable even at that price: he would readily have given the same sum to know Arnold's real thoughts on the subject, and to make sure how much he suspected him.

No one, from Arnold's cold, calm, almost stolid air, would have conjectured the secret

triumph of his mind, whilst thus confronting Wildey; he saw the clerk was in his power, and that he could make his own terms as to any knowledge he possessed. That the idea of these railway transactions coming to his employer's ears, alarmed him greatly was most evident; and this convinced Arnold that they really were some nefarious proceedings of his own, which would not bear inspection; probably he spoke the truth when he said that the mention of them to Mr. Cameron would cost him his situation.

How to use this knowledge to the best advantage was now the question in Arnold's mind; and it was one which required considerable reflection to decide and answer. Mr. Cameron's domestic happiness demanded that the misunderstanding with his wife should be explained and done away; and for May's character, it seemed desirable a reunion should be effected, even before his mercantile affairs were inquired into. This object Arnold believed to be partly in Wildey's power; for aware how little his word deserved credit, he

was inclined to doubt his assertion of total ignorance as to Mr. Cameron's movements; he supposed him induced to adopt this system of secresy partly to carry on his plots against May, partly to keep the merchant himself at a distance, and partly to prevent any one else communicating with him.

The knowledge which he sought, would probably be the last which the clerk would wish to communicate, if he feared Arnold would make unpleasant allusions to it, or remarks which might tend to dangerous discoveries. Yet he could not justify to himself the making a promise of secresy concerning the railway speculations, or allowing Wildey to continue dishonest proceedings if he could prevent it.

"So you really do not know Mr. Cameron's address?" said he at last, breaking a protracted silence. "It is of great importance to find it out."

"Upon my honour, I do not," exclaimed Wildey, "I have no motive for concealing it," his eye followed Arnold's as he spoke towards those papers again. "Do not suppose I

should hesitate on *that* account; I know, Arnold, I can trust you, as a man of honour; and knowledge accidentally acquired, of affairs which do not belong to you, will be kept sacred. You will *not* risk an allusion to those shares before old Cameron."

Before Arnold had made any reply to this appeal, a junior clerk entered to say, that the postman had just brought another letter, which had been overlooked before.

Wildey caught it impatiently from his hand, and glanced eagerly at the address; Arnold unceremoniously looked over him as he held it.

"Good!" observed he, "that's Cameron's hand, now we shall have his address; and you can send notice to him about that railway-scrip to-day!"

Again the two gentlemen turned their glance on the doubtful papers, and then their eyes met: Wildey's were troubled with fear and uncertainty, Arnold's look betrayed the slightest possible gleam of scorn and triumph, so momentary in the expression, indeed, that his companion scarcely knew whether he had read it

right, and after it had passed away, the same dull calm filled them as ever.

Wildey dared make no answer; he was uncertain whether Arnold was aware of his fears, or whether it was only his own restless conscience taking alarm at shadows, which disturbed him.

"Open the letter," said Arnold, "I must know the address."

Wildey would have refused had he dared; of all things in the world, it seemed most desirable to keep his brother-in-law in ignorance of Mr. Cameron's where-abouts, and prevent their having any communication; but there was no retreat now, no excuse for refusal. He feared to irritate him, even more than he feared to give him this information; and reluctantly, he opened the letter, which without the slightest scruple Arnold read over his shoulder.

It was short and formal; more so than Wildey had expected, and it disappointed him. It expressed no emotion, explained no feelings, opened no door for confidence, sympathy, or overtures of friendship. If Mr. Cameron had

quitted his own house in the natural course of events, if nothing had passed between him, his wife, or his clerk out of the usual routine, and he had experienced nothing of a nature to distress, vex, or alarm him, he could not possibly have written a more concise, business-like and cold letter. It merely stated that he was at Birmingham, that his letters were to be addressed to such a hotel, and he desired Wildey immediately to forward any which were waiting for him in town.

Mr. Cameron's letters were always of this character; he had no idea of writing effusions of affection, details of sensibility, or narrations of trivial events. But although his clerk was perfectly aware of this, he could not suppress a feeling of disappointment, at the very dry and matter-of-fact document now before him. It gave him no information, and what was worse, gave him neither authority for exertion, nor opportunity for interference in the merchant's private and domestic affairs. It seemed to ignore the disagreement with the wife, and it afforded no hint as to what the husband intended to do.

"Well," said he, after having read it over three times, and laying it down on the table, "what am I to do?"

"Do, why send Cameron's letters down to Birmingham of course, and those certificates, or scrip, or whatever they are with them," replied Arnold, stretching out his hand, and coolly taking up a handful of the papers lying there, "that is if they are worth sending; most railway-shares are rubbish in my opinion!"

Wildey's horror at this moment deprived him of speech and motion. He had feared all along that Arnold suspected him; and he doubted whether now, as his brother-in-law held in his hand the certificate of shares on which his name appeared, he could by any process of lying induce him to believe that they really belonged to Mr. Cameron. He stood silent, therefore, from excessive fear, and his mind was divided between wonder what Arnold would do or say next, and speculations how soon a spider just then descending from the ceiling would alight on that gentleman's head.

"Sit down, Wildey, I want to talk to you;"

said Arnold presently, drawing his chair to a comfortable distance from the table.

There was nothing for it but obedience.

"You have done a great deal of mischief, Wildey, one way and another," began the other, speaking in the calmest voice, "I suspect this flight of Mr. Cameron and his sudden jealousy of his wife have owed their origin largely to your suggestions; you best know your reasons for interfering. Oh, I don't want you to explain," seeing Wildey about to speak, "defend yourself when I have done; but wait till then. Now I have my fancies as well as you; and mine, or one of mine at least, is to see May and her husband on good terms; do you understand? All this doubt about the duel, and the aspersions on her character, and such nonsense, must be cleared up, and no more suspicions put into the husband's head. I do not mean to make you accuse yourself, or indeed to insist on anything from you, except non-interference. Let us alone to make up the quarrel you have manufactured so cleverly, and we will do as little harm to your character as we can, con-

sistent with justice to Mrs. Cameron, to the Dunsfords, and any others whom you have injured. Do you agree to this?"

"I don't understand why you talk to me in this way," exclaimed Wildey, haughtily, for he had suddenly made up his mind to a bold line of conduct. "What have you got to do with making conditions or terms with me?"

"Why, to be sure, it may seem a work of supererogation," observed Arnold, calmly, "when you are completely in my power, to offer any terms to one whose conduct little deserves mercy. But to say the truth, as my wife's brother, I felt desirous to save your character, and if I could do so, with due regard to Cameron's affairs, and such considerations as my own honesty and honour, I really would rather do it than not!"

Wildey made an impatient, undecided gesture, but did not speak.

"Well, you see, there is nothing in the world now, to prevent my going down to Birmingham at once, telling Mr. Cameron that his wife has left his house as he wished her to do, and recommending him at once to return to London,

to look after his own affairs, both in the railway-market and elsewhere. Nothing in fact will prevent my doing this, except your making me a solemn promise, to cease your interference in your cousin's domestic matters, and to confine your attention entirely to the business of the counting-house. What do you say to that?"

Wildey hesitated, and fidgetted, then said, "And if I did make this promise—" and then he stopped abruptly.

"What guarantee should I have for your keeping it?" ejaculated Arnold, "is that what you were going to suggest, eh! I was thinking of that myself!"

"No," replied Wildey, struggling between indignation, shame, and reluctance, "how you talk, I suppose it's your way;" making a ghastly attempt at a smile, at the same time. He continued: "I meant, if you made this condition on my part, what would you do for me in return. I think—you really—for instance, about these railway-matters—do you mean to give me security for secresy, or would you hold them *in terrorem* over my head. I must know that."

"What do I know of those railway-shares?" retorted Arnold, "except that you say the mere mention of them would ruin you, and that I see they stand in your name."

"It's of no use pretending to deny it, Arnold, of course they are in my name—and—and—I certainly do not wish them named to Cameron. In fact, they are private speculations of my own!"

"And how much have you gained that way?"

"Lost, lost a couple of hundreds by the last fall in the —— line; but I have hopes to cover it by another purchase made yesterday, I trust with more judgment."

"Is that all you have lost?"

"Actual loss, yes! but I *had* cleared nearly a thousand at one time, and now I am minus two hundred."

"And how much have you risked in all?"

"Above two thousand now if I were to lose it all."

"Ah—your own money, of course?"

"Not a farthing; I have nothing—to be

candid with you, Arnold, I have not a pound of my own, unless I make it by these specs. It was debts drove me to this resource, and I gained at first—now if I were to lose, I suppose I must shoot myself—for I am in a desperate state. But I shall not lose, I am persuaded."

"Ah!"

"You see I am quite frank with you."

"Soh! what did you mean to make by this quarrel between the Camerons?"

"To make it up, of course!"

"For how much, your motto seems to be nothing for nothing—may I ask your price?"

Wildey hesitated, and his countenance expressed more reluctance to answer than he had shown before.

"Come, frankly—was it to be done for love or money?"

The clerk continued silent.

"I know you used to entertain a passion for your cousin yourself, Wildey; pray was the price of her restoration to her husband's confidence, to be the forfeiture of deserving it."

"I am not quite a demon, Arnold," exclaimed Wildey, warmly, "whatever you may think of me, not so bad as that; that I meant to make terms in my own favour, of course, I am not going to deny, but they would have been nothing of that kind. May's influence with her husband I should certainly have stipulated for, and if all those speculations had failed, I should have depended on that influence to cover my short-comings, and to save my credit. I dare say she could supply me with money—I thought of that; and at all events she could screen me from any bad effects consequent on detection. Beyond what I have already imposed on her, I contemplated no additional restraint, and never for a moment thought of tampering with her conjugal affection. Indeed I know *that* would be utterly hopeless; I should meet with nothing but scorn and contempt. No, no, Arnold, at present I have no design on her heart, *you* know that would be hopelessly absurd."

"A very excellent reason for not entertaining it; you do not indulge a passion for your neighbour's wife, because, you feel sure she

would not listen to it. *Bene.* Now, Wildey, if I were to say off hand, that I will save you from your difficulties, what would you say to me?"

"That it is much more than—" he stopped.

"Than you deserve; granted—but we do sometimes get that, and must bear it."

"More than I expected, I meant to say."

"Probably—but I know what the consequence would be if I did. Were I to make you sell off all those shares at once, pay the difference, and settle your debts out of my own pocket, you would—"

"Be eternally obliged to you, my dear fellow!"

"Pshaw—you would go and speculate again, I know that. Nothing can cure a man once bitten with the mania for gambling; and no result but utter ruin ever stops them."

"Indeed, you do me wrong, I have no love for the game in itself; it was necessity drove me to it, pressing debts, which I saw no other prospect of paying; and once clear of those I assure you on my honour that nothing would tempt me to renew the experiment. I have suffered

enough from it. But I am more to be pitied than blamed."

"Bah! you were not obliged to contract the debts; what invincible necessity compelled you to exceed your income; to keep your horses, your two establishments; to give your extravagant parties. Not to be blamed indeed, I believe you my fine fellow; of course I am quite open to the self-evident conviction that a man in your station had no choice but to incur these liabilities, any person under similar circumstances would have done the same; and having involved yourself, it equally became a matter of course, as consistent with rational prudence, as it was with honesty and integrity to speculate with your employer's money, and chance it whether you doubled your debts or paid them. I do pity you most sincerely; upon my word, you deserve to be transported."

"Thank you," answered Wildey, trying ineffectually to smile, because he really did not know what else to do; he was so overpowered with chagrin and mortification.

"You see, Wildey, I am not to be imposed

on that way," continued Arnold, beating time to his words on the table with a sheet of paper he had rolled up as he spoke. "I know perfectly well that you have acted like a rogue—there, don't be angry, that will do no good—and you cannot by any conventional phrases, or set forms of expression, make me think differently; differently, I mean, as to the guilt of your conduct; you may alter my opinion as to your regret or contrition; as long as you attempt to justify yourself in that fashion, so long I shall be inclined to harden my heart and shut my hands to you. Do you not see, that if you assert these debts to have been inevitable, and therefore not blameable, you as good as admit that you would, if tempted, do the same thing again. Once more in debt, you would have recourse to the same expedient; you would be detected, convicted, transported at last, and the only effect any interference on my part would have produced, would be that I should be the loser of a considerable sum. To save the character of my wife's brother, I would not mind paying a little money; but not one farthing will I advance to prop up that

character for a year or two, that it may fall at last with more mischievous notoriety. No, no, something I must have for my money; either interest from the funds, and leave you to go to the dogs, or security that you pass the rest of your life as a respectable member of society."

"I would be most happy to give you any security you may require on those terms; only save me now, and I will do anything you dictate."

"Pooh, pooh, you have no security to give. I believe it will never do; I must warn Mr. Cameron, and leave you to your fate."

"That is not fair, Arnold, I protest; you are bound to do something after lecturing and abusing me so, or I shall say like the negro, 'no preachee and floggee both.' Your gratuitous fault-finding is a sort of engagement that you mean to assist me. Come, stand my friend now this once, and I solemnly promise you to abandon all railway speculations for ever."

"That is not enough; you must release May from the promise she made you before her marriage, cease from all interference in her concerns, break up your establishment in

Fitzroy Square, and confine your expenses to your present income. On these conditions, I will take your affairs in hand, and will advance you money to pay off the most pressing of your debts, or make some other arrangements which will clear you; but then I must have a full and particular account of all you owe; and after all, I dare say you will cheat me. No, now be quiet, I want no protestations, no assertions of immaculate honesty. I am making a great fool of myself in doing anything for you at all; but don't fancy I am not aware of that, and am not fully prepared to repent what I have done. I am not to be hoodwinked by professions at least."

Wildey could not afford to reject his assistance in his present dilemma, or the ungracious way in which it was promised would have prevented his accepting it. He was too completely in the power of his brother-in-law to dare to resent his language, or to reject his proposal. An unexpected revolution, sudden as it was disastrous had reduced him to this unhappy predicament, and whilst trembling on the verge of ruin, he was forced to crouch to the man he

detested, and even thank him for his interference.

"Now I must go," said Arnold, abruptly rising. "Get the schedule of your debts as soon as you can; I will call in to-night and see how you go on. I expect some steps will be taken by that time to dismiss your other household. That is one of your first reforms, so be so good as to attend to that matter immediately. Good bye!"

CHAPTER III.

Come what come may,
Time and the hour wear through the roughest day!
MACBETH.

WHEN Mr. Arnold left May in her boudoir, whilst he went into the city previously to her starting for the station, the first feeling of her heart was a wish to lie down, and give way to a shower of tears. But she had sufficient strength of mind to conquer this weakness, and to rouse herself to exertion, for she had much to do. Her first care was to see that excuses were immediately sent off to those who had been invited for that evening to her house. This occupied her a considerable time; and some other minor arrangements of her own, with

reference to her books, her jewels and her private accounts fully engaged her until it was almost time to expect Mr. Arnold back again. Proudly resolved to take nothing with her but what was actually her own, or absolutely indispensable, she enclosed the jewels with which her husband had loaded her in their several cases, and placing the whole under lock and key, she sealed up the latter in an envelope directed to him, containing nothing besides, except a slip of paper to designate the repository which it would open.

Whilst doing this, a question agitated her mind—should she appeal to his justice, and claim from him, what was, in fact, the right of every one, a candid and impartial hearing? As she put away, one after the other, those little tokens of his affection, more valuable to her as such, than for their own intrinsic worth, she debated this point again and again; but she came to no decision, and eventually it was settled simply by the fact that she did not leave herself time to do it.

A farewell note she hastily penned to Grace Dunsford, to explain the sudden change in her

intentions, and Arnold arrived by the time she had completed it; so, intrusting it to his care, she made the last preparations for her journey. Great as was the pain of her mind, her demeanour was quiet and calm; anger had subsided, and the acutest self-reproach had succeeded in its place—a self-reproach which at intervals seemed as if it would break her heart; but it was only at intervals that she was thus vividly alive to her circumstances; a sort of numbness had come over her spirits which prevented any distinct impressions of sorrow or pain. She went through what was necessary with precision, like an automaton, with an impression that something bad had happened, and that something worse would follow; but she did not realize her situation to herself. All the little details of getting ready for a journey, which, in ordinary circumstances she would have hurried over, or left to others to attend to, now seemed to engross her completely, to the exclusion of all thought as to the reason, the object and the end of that journey. With a desperate defiance of the bitter feelings which she could not exclude, she crushed them down deep in

her heart; she turned her thoughts from the reality—she refused to contemplate it.

Had her life depended on it, she could scarcely have devoted more attention to fastening the brooch in her mantle, or appeared more earnestly intent on buttoning her gloves; nor was it merely in appearance that she was so engrossed by trifles; her mind, amidst all its confusion, and flutter, and agony, did not recognise the fact that she was leaving her husband's house, perhaps for ever; it rather seemed that it was some other person, not herself, whose trouble she was contemplating, almost as if she were merely reading some melancholy tale, which when it ceased to interest her, or grew too distressing, she could lay down and resume her own brighter views of life.

It never could be really true that she, Mr. Cameron's wife, was compelled, and by him, too, to quit his house thus abruptly; this was some monstrous fiction, some wild imagination, impossible in the nature of things. It was a dream, a farce, a piece of idle child's play, which must soon come to an end. It was not worth thinking of, or sorrowing for.

These were the indistinct feelings of her heart; of course, at intervals she recalled the truth, and feared to look forwards; but in general she did not think at all, and as I have said, acted with the dull, monotonous carefulness of a well-regulated automaton.

Had Arnold known anything of woman's nature, or had he known more of the physical advantages of tears in distress, he would probably have been more uneasy at her appearance. But like most men, he regarded crying and all demonstrative grief, as weakness, and her calmness was to him an extreme relief. He had feared she would weep, and then he should not have known what to do; now he saw her quiet and composed, and he was satisfied. Had he looked at her countenance with anything like the quickness of apprehension with which he would have contemplated an affair of business, he would have judged differently; so unlike was the expression of her face to that which it usually wore.

The dark circles round her eyes, and her heavy eyelids, told of the tears which were kept down by despair, but which shed would have

relieved her heart. Her cheek, white as marble, and her lips quivering with emotion whenever any circumstance recalled her recollection to herself, would have spoken volumes to a more accurate reader of woman's feelings; but to him they caused little concern, and he parted from her in the carriage without an idea that such repressed emotion could be dangerous to health or reason. Mrs. Cameron and her maid, had seated themselves in an empty carriage, as May was in hopes of solitude and silence on her journey, but she was disappointed; for ere the train started, another party, and apparently a very loquacious one, selected the carriage for themselves. May drew her thick veil closely over her face, and then reconnoitred through its folds the new-comers, with a very lively fear of meeting some acquaintance.

There were three other ladies who entered; and as the elder of them was talking, there was something in her voice which May thought she remembered. She shrank farther into her corner, and drew her veil closer still. Fortunately, her provident maid, careful as all

waiting-women ought to be of their lady's complexions, had brought for her use one of those silk shades whch have been most truthfully stigmatized by modern writers as "ugly," and under these circumstances, May was happy to tie it over her face, and thus effectually to screen her features from observation in the dull livid shadow which it threw on them.

Whilst she was adjusting this little appendage to her bonnet she did not notice the further addition to the party of a gentleman, who seated himself *vis-à-vis* to the elder lady, and apparently devoted himself to her service; but when May again looked round, she saw that their party seemed completed, as the door was closed, and no vacant seat remained. The train was not yet ready to start, and there was nothing to engage her attention except the conversation between her neighbours which was carried on in so lively a tone, that it was evident they had no objection to its being heard. The smiling lady seemed to be giving her companion a *résumé* of all the gossip of the week in the fashionable circles of London, and then she

added a slight sketch of her own plans, by listening to which, May was soon able to settle who her fellow-travellers were. She was right in the fact that she had seen them before, but they were not acquainted, and she reasonably hoped that she should not be recognised if she carefully concealed her face and avoided speaking. They were some time waiting for the signal to start, and whilst porters and police were rushing about with piles of portmanteaus and pyramids of carpet-bags, whilst anxious men-passengers were peering into every carriage for a comfortable seat, and nervous lady-travellers were tormenting themselves with distracted doubts as to whether they ever should see their cap-boxes again, the gossip proceeded without interruption.

But at length the bell rang, the engine shrieked, the last lingering passenger rushed frantically to his seat, and the train moved slowly and deliberately off from the terminus after the sobbing engine, accelerating its pace as those huge, puffing sighs came faster and faster, until presently they were tearing along at a rate which has given birth to the new comparison,

"railway speed." Still the exalted tones in which her companions talked, enabled May to hear all they said; and she learned from their conversation many little bits of gossip relative to those with whom she was well acquainted, which would otherwise never have come to her ears. But her thoughts wandered away to other considerations, and she was reflecting on some scenes of past happiness which some of the names they mentioned recalled to her, when she was startled into attention again, by hearing the gentleman inquire whether his friend was acquainted with the beautiful Mrs. Cameron.

With something of bitterness in her tone, the lady hastily replied in the negative:

"She was not in *our* set," continued she, "and I confess I was unwilling that my daughters should associate with one whose conduct as a flirt made her so notorious."

May betrayed no emotion on hearing these words, she neither turned away, nor in any respect altered her position, but she waited with some curiosity to learn what would come next.

"She moved in good society, too," observed he.

"Indeed! I knew her merely by name. She and her husband were always spoken of as 'May and December' in our own circle. I understand he was a wealthy man, and in these mercenary days, money, you know, is reckoned by a certain class as a passport to place; all aristocratic feelings are considered as prejudices, and *wealth*, you know, is *worth*. I must plead guilty to entertaining these same old prejudices still, and prefer birth to a long purse; but I believe I am growing quite singular."

"She had the claim of extreme beauty; to the chief part of my sex this is a first-rate consideration," said the gentleman.

"Oh! you thought her pretty, did you, *chacun à son goût?* Now really, tell me," smilingly pointing to his gloves, "do you call that mourning? fie, you ought to be more particular," shaking her finger at him with arch playfulness.

"What does it signify? Do you mean my gloves being sewed with white? It's of no consequence."

"Quite what I call patch-work," continued she, perseveringly.

"Never mind; I thought Mrs. Cameron lovely when I once saw her, and very amusing."

"Oh, I dare say; men are always pleased with those who pay them *les petits soins;* is it not so? and some women condescend to give instead of accept them. I am a naughty, proud-spirited woman, who will not stoop to conquer, and of course cannot expect but to be in a minority in my opinions on such subjects. I only hope I shall never see my daughters like that Mrs. Cameron, it would break my heart, I know, could I think it possible."

"Law, mamma, what an idea! I am sure, if I were married, I should never think of flirting again; I think it so wicked," cried one.

"No, nor polking and waltzing," cried the other, "taking away the partners from those who are not married, and of course have more claim to them!"

"Nor being so surrounded by men on

horseback in the park, I hope," pursued mamma. "I protest it is quite discreditable to a wife to find all the men pursuing her so."

The train was now slackening its speed preparatory to stopping at the station to which they were approaching, and from the little bustle among the ladies, it appeared that they were here intending to alight. May gathered that the gentleman, of whom she had not the slightest recollection, in spite of her efforts to recall his features to memory, did not leave the train; he assisted his acquaintance, when they stopped; handed them out, and looked after them until they were safely deposited in somebody's care, and then, when the door was closed, composedly changed his seat for one on the opposite side, which commanded a fuller view of the faces of his two companions.

Again they proceeded, and now profound silence reigned in the carriage. He drew out a book, and appeared engrossed in its pages; May leaned back in her corner, and gave way

to vexing thoughts, and sad regrets; and her maid, being of an industrious turn of mind, occupied herself in some intricate crotchet-work; from which, however, she ever and anon glanced up to survey the gentleman, fancying his eyes were oftener engaged in trying to penetrate under the shade of Mrs. Cameron's blue "ugly" than in perusing the pages before him.

The afternoon was warm and bright, and the sun, now sinking in the west, threw a hot glare into the carriage-windows. Oppressed by the heat, and forgetting, in her sorrowful reflections, her desire for concealment, May first pushed back the blue shade, and then threw up her veil, and just as the sun poured its yellow beams full on her face, she turned to her maid, and desired her to draw down the blind.

The flush of heat, perhaps, also, the glow of wounded feelings, had succeeded to the deadly paleness which had previously marked her countenance; and, in spite of the melancholy and langour of her expression, any one who had previously seen her must have remembered her

again. It was no wonder, therefore, if the gentleman who had so long been watching for a good view of a face which interested him, when he thus suddenly saw it, lighted up by a brilliant sunbeam, which played on her glossy ringlets, and gave a warm glow to her cheek, should recognise the features. His start and look of confused surprise, convinced the watchful attendant that he had done so, and it was with great internal satisfaction that she noted his embarrassed and uneasy air; she fixed her own eyes on him, and when Mrs. Cameron's face had again disappeared under her bonnet, and he looked inquiringly at her companion, she gave him a glance of triumphant intelligence, which seemed to say that he was right, and that she hoped he was ashamed of himself and his friends, for their impertinent comments on her lady.

None of this was perceived by May herself, who, quite unconscious that she had been known, continued passive in the corner, and gradually overcome by drowsiness, partly the effect of mental excitement, partly the result of bodily fatigue, dropped into a slight slumber,

which gradually deepened into profound repose.

When he became convinced that she was really asleep, their fellow-traveller again changed his position to a seat beside the maid, and addressing her in a low voice, expressed a hope that there was nothing the matter to cause the sad looks, and depressed air of the lady, or to occasion her quitting London in this manner.

Mrs. Hallam, the waiting-woman, replied discreetly, that her young lady had said nothing to her about it, and that if she had, it would have been in the confidence of her dressing-room, and that it would be a breach of trust to betray it, one of which she hoped she was perfectly incapable.

Her companion commended her discretion, and inquired if they were going far on the line; learning that they would leave the rail at Boston, he observed with satisfaction that he also was going to the same place. Had they friends there?

Mrs. Hallam protested she did not know; she had no doubt her lady had friends wherever

it was proper and right, but whether Boston was one of those places, she could not say. He said he hoped if they needed any assistance they would apply to him; on which she replied that she had no doubt Mrs. Cameron would be vastly obliged to him, but she did not suppose it was at all likely that they should find occasion to trouble him, as the man-servant could do everything that was required, and her lady was not used to be *obligated* to strangers.

"Indeed," she added, bridling and pursing up her mouth in such a way, that the words had some difficulty in escaping between her lips, "after all the rude and disagreeable things which had been said of her mistress, she guessed she would be rather particular what communications she held with some person's friends; and, for her own part, she, Mrs. Hallam, would never have spoken at all, if it had not been that she wished to say that people who live in glass houses should not throw stones, and that she was happy to say she never had seen her mistress smiling and ogling and coquetting as some people did who were old enough to be ashamed

of it, if years had anything to do with wisdom, as they very seldom had; that her mistress was an angel, and of course everybody admired her as looked at her, and nobody more so than Mr. Cameron himself; many a time would he bring her a beautiful gown, and say, 'Hallam, my good Hallam, make this up for your mistress against such a day; there's a *fête*, or a ball, or a something, and she must look beautiful.' That was acting as a gentleman and a good husband should; and she should always maintain that Mr. Cameron was both; and if he did not mind her dancing, or smiling, or talking with others, why should anybody else concern themselves, she would be glad to know? Such people need not think they would be looked at, even if Mrs. Cameron wore a mask; no, not if they lived to the time of Methusaleh. Her lady was a sweet angel, and, however lovely she smiled on gentlemen as was nothing to her (and how could she help that, too, though she did not keep screw-screwing her poor face into one everlasting grin) or however sweetly she sang when her drawing-room was full of company, she smiled much sweeter on her own lawful husband, and

sang to him, when there was nobody else to listen to her, by the hour together, and it was like ten thousand nightingales, and a great deal finer than Miss Adelaide Kemble, or any of the Grisis they made such fusses about at the Opera; and if people only had to pay two or three guineas to hear it, she had no doubt they would come in crowds; and she thought *that* was being a good wife, and behaving as a lady ought to do to her husband; and she had no doubt, but as soon as Mr. Cameron had done his business, as kept him in town now, he would be down to Lincolnshire to comfort her, as she was very sad, probably because her uncle or somebody was ill, Mrs. Hallam did not know exactly."

And having made this speech to the great amusement of her listener, she indignantly turned away, and resumed her crotchet with accelerated industry.

He returned to the opposite side of the carriage, and sat watching May's face, brought out in strong relief by the dark cushion against which her head was resting. She slept quietly,

until the shades of evening gathered round them, nor could he tell precisely when she awoke; but when the lamp was lighted in the carriage, he caught the bright gleam of her eyes, as she drew her bonnet closer over her face.

"Can you tell if we are near our journey's end, Hallam," said she, "we seem to be going very slowly, and we have been a great while on the road."

Mrs. Hallam could give no information, but their companion looking at his watch, told them that they ought to be at Boston by this time, and as they were evidently slackening their speed, he supposed they had almost reached that place.

Slower and slower they proceeded, until at length they stopped altogether, and then they looked out curiously into the night; they seemed in the open country, no sign of lights, no symptom of a station, no tokens of a town were near. Why they had thus stopped, they could not guess; whereabouts they were they had no means of discovering; something was

evidently wrong in the train, men were seen walking backwards and forwards with lanthorns in their hands, which illuminated their legs, and those of others near them, and produced a grotesque effect, as the strong shadows followed them along the ground; there were voices heard in subdued conversation, and a knocking or hammering; and passengers from every carriage put out their heads and cried nervously. What *is* the matter? and were answered gruffly, nothing, or perhaps got no answer at all, as the legs, lanthorns and dark shadows passed them rapidly.

"Goodness, gracious!" exclaimed Mrs. Hallam, in great trepidation, "something has happened, or will happen directly; we shall have a junction, or a concussion, or something terrible. What shall we do, what shall we do?"

"Sit quiet," replied May, courageously, "and I dare say no harm will happen; we shall go on again directly."

"I am sure I will sit quiet, if you think that best ma'am as I ought to do; but those good-for-nothing railway-men, think no more of

smashing a hundred or two of people, than I do of breaking an egg; they would not like to be smashed themselves, I believe, and now they have all got out, and are safe on the side-rails, so if another train comes down on us, we shall be the unfortunate sufferers, as the newspapers say, and they will get no harm."

"I believe we are tolerably safe as there is no train due this hour or more; I have looked in Bradshaw," observed the gentleman.

"Never mind what Bradshaw says," interrupted Hallam, earnestly, "we were behind our time in leaving London, and whenever one train starts late, as sure as a gun, the next goes off so much earlier; that's what they call punctuality and regularity. If I had my way, Sir, I would keep all the railway-directors standing with a rope round their necks, and every time there was a smash and a murder, I would hang up one, beginning in alphabetical order, until I taught them better; and if people lost their legs and arms, why the directors should have their's cut off for company, and the only favour I would allow them, would be to draw lots who should suffer. That's the way I would

manage, and see if they would not go fair and softly then."

"Your measures are founded on an equally extensive acquaintance with human nature and the English constitution; and are as consistent with policy as justice. The number of directors would be rapidly thinned by such stringent measures; I do not know that there would be any great harm in that!"

"I am quite sure it would do good," pursued Mrs. Hallam, warmly, "for the best constitution in the world, (and I have no doubt that *is* the English one,) cannot stand hanging twice, and a man with a rope round his neck, which might be tightened at any minute, would be pretty tender of the lives of others. I wonder the companies can sleep on their pillow when they think how many lives they have smashed up, one time with another."

"We are moving on again now," observed the gentleman, "so I hope *we* shall have nothing to accuse them of. Were you alarmed, Mrs. Cameron?" tenderly addressing May.

She gave him a quiet assurance in the negative.

She felt ashamed of returning to her uncle's house, disgraced and deserted, and thought with bitterness on the author of all this evil, the cousin who was, as she told herself, the one responsible for her errors and her misfortunes. But bitter condemnation of another is not the tone of mind suitable to self-humiliation, and as May travelled on next day, many penitent feelings vanished, and worldly ones began to take their place as she readily excused herself, and condemned another.

"After all," thought she, "why should I fret and vex myself so, and thus throw away present pleasure in compliment to what is past. I will not be so silly; nor are things really so very bad. I have done no such great wrong; I am more sinned against than sinning. I *will* enjoy myself." Then the thought of her uncle's pleasure in seeing her, on which she fully depended, his affectionate reception, Mrs. Arnold's astonishment, and all the little, pleasant bustle attending her arrival, occupied her mind.

There would be no need of making her present situation, as regarded her husband,

known, at least for a time; if he were really obstinate, if he refused to be reconciled, and she were really forced to end her days, therefore, at Littlemere, it would then be time enough to find some explanation which should afford a reason for their separation, at all events, she need hint at nothing of the kind now; and when Mr. Arnold returned, it would be easy to concert with him, how much or how little of the past should be revealed. Poverty would be no longer an evil to be dreaded at Littlemere, she should still have the means of enjoying the luxuries of life, and although forced to forego the variety and dissipation into which she had so deeply plunged, there would be no other privation to be dreaded. Books and music, and feminine amusements of a domestic nature, would still be at her command; gardening and all the rural employments with which ladies can divert their time, and expend their money in the country.

She knew that Mr. Arnold had done much to improve Littlemere, and contemplated still more, but she doubted not that there would be

plenty left for her to do; her taste and love of beauty could assist him, and since he really was not a person to be dreaded or disliked, she was sure they should go on well together.

And in these considerations she amused herself for some time, not openly avowing, perhaps even scarcely conscious that behind all these plans, there was one hope which gave all the rest their bright hues, and served to reconcile her to the present, and this was her firm conviction that her husband would ere long, himself seek a reconciliation. Without this, she would not so easily have endured the prospect before her, but in this hope, she was ready to look forward cheerfully, and concluded herself amiably philosophical in so doing.

It was about three o'clock in the afternoon, when they drew up at the porch of Littlemere. The place was so changed that May hardly recognised it; the narrow circle of grass, before the door, enclosed by the ruinous and dingy wall, and surrounded by the moss-grown road to which it would have been extreme courtesy

to have applied the name of gravel, had disappeared. The draft-collecting yew-trees, in whose gloomy boughs the wind seemed always whistling, had gone too, excepting one or two of the most remote from the house, and the most picturesque in form. The broken gate, off its hinges, the stone pillars to which it should have been appended, and the muddy road through the field had all been moved. The whole enclosure in front of the house had been greatly extended, and by some magic process, as May thought, the wall, the gateway, and its accompaniments had been thrown back, at least a couple of hundred yards, and there they stood, grey and antique-looking, but no longer out of repair or untidy, and embracing within their circuit an extent of smooth green lawn, and a capital gravel-drive, on each side of which were cut flower borders now looking lovely with young flowers. These borders, indeed, were arranged in a formal and somewhat old-fashioned style; and the straight rows of evergreens which promised in a few years to screen the sides of the lawn, produced an effect

of antique taste, but this was in accordance with the general aspect of the house itself, and far more consistent with the character of the place, than any attempts at the picturesque or fantastic could ever have been.

The porch, which was an addition to the house of considerable size, and carried up to the roof, she immediately felt must be an immense improvement. She knew how much it must add to the dimensions of the room up-stairs, and she felt how agreeable it must be to enter the house itself in stormy weather, unaccompanied by the gusts of wind, and torrents of rain, which in former times were almost as freely admitted as the inmates themselves.

The dingy walls, too, had been improved in appearance, a trellis-work had been carried up against the house, to which young creepers were now clinging on the western side, and as she afterwards discovered, the north and eastern walls of the dwelling, had been carefully defended from the damp ocean tempests, so that the rooms in those corners of the house were now quite as habitable, and not less comfortable

than the others. A very hasty survey, conveyed to May's mind the impression that great improvements had been effected, and she was more than ever satisfied of the good sense and taste of Mr. Arnold, whose judgment of course had managed all this.

She had not, however, many minutes to wait, ere the door was opened by a tidy, pleasant-looking maiden, who answered her inquiries, by an assurance that Mrs. Arnold was within, and Mr. Luttrell was out, with the further unnecessary information that Mr. Arnold was away, and had been gone for three days, she did not know where.

Without stopping to enlighten her ignorance, May alighted, desired her things should be brought in, and after giving some further directions to her footman, relative to his immediate return to London, she walked quietly into the house.

No dusty windows, no worn out floor-cloth, no ragged stair-carpet, no scolding Nanny, greeted either her eyes or ears. The stone floor of the hall, clean as hands could make it, and crossed here and there by strips of

Indian matting, looked light and cheerful in the sunshine, which poured in from the glass-door under the stairs, now occupying the place of the once dirty iron-barred window; whilst the walls were adorned with articles from foreign lands, the fruits of Mr. Arnold's travels. She opened the door of the sitting-room, and at the first glance she took in all the comfortable changes there effected. The modern and elegant furniture which she had sent, had been tended by careful hands, the room was ornamented by some capital paintings, sweet and gay with odoriferous flowers, and lighter far than formerly, for another window had been opened on the southern side, leading into a conservatory, evidently well attended to.

No one being in the room, after one look round, which took in all the improvements, from the new paper on the wall, to the bear-skin rugs, and wild fox-skin mats upon the ground, May went to the conservatory-door, which was open, and here she saw her cousin busily engaged in watering the flowers.

Perhaps of all the changes and improvements there, that in Ann Arnold was the greatest.

She had grown plumper, fresher, brighter; she looked cheerful and happy; and seemed to have gone back once more to the days of her youth. Indeed, it may fairly be doubted whether in her youthful days, whilst living in a dull small house in London, and kept under by the commanding genius of her brother, she ever shewed the bloom and gaiety she now developed. It was evident, that with all his whims, his odd habits, and apparent selfish indolence, Arnold had proved a good and kind husband, and that he had some right to lecture May on breach of conjugal duty, if he was so careful to practise it himself.

Certainly his had been an easy task; accustomed to no indulgence, no consideration, to slave without receiving thanks for her exertions, and to sacrifice herself, her time, her skill, meeting reproaches often for her sole reward, until indifference and inattention became luxuries, she had required little from him to make her happy. To find herself appreciated in a slight degree brought an intense enjoyment with it, such as she had never known before, and she soon learned to love her husband with warmth, and to regard Mr. Luttrell with the truest

affection. The magic light of love brought out qualities hitherto undreamt of in her mind. Highly informed, extremely talented, witty or beautiful she could not be, nor did any one ask it of her. But so far as was in her power, she entered into her husband's pursuits, identified herself with his tastes, followed out his plans, and devoted herself to assist his numerous improvements. She even read the books he introduced to her notice, and although she did not understand much, she yet picked up sufficient information on important points, to hold her station creditably as his companion.

Reader, did you ever follow out Mrs. Loudon's directions for preserving mignionette in the winter? did you ever keep the tender plants in the dark till they were blanched, and unsightly to the eye, and then on removing them to light and warmth and sunshine, watch how the healthy green mounted to their leaves, and how rapidly they put forth buds and delicious blossoms? If so, you can form an accurate idea of the change which had come over Mrs. Arnold since her transportation to the new home where she found affection and kind treatment.

CHAPTER IV.

Then must you speak
Of one who lov'd not wisely but too well,
Of one not easily jealous; but being wrought—
Perplexed in the extreme:

OTHELLO.

THERE is nothing in all the world so variable as the human mind, nothing too strange and inconsistent for a man to do when under the influence of his passions. Hurricanes and whirlwinds may have their laws, and philosophers may learn to account for their causes, or predict their occurrence; but no human power or foresight can tell the caprices of violent emotions, or prepare us for

Led by impulse, and perfectly careless where he went, Mr. Cameron drove to Euston Square, and stepping into a train preparing to start for Birmingham, was rapidly borne away from his wife and his home. Very bitter were his thoughts and recollections as he seated himself in the corner of a carriage, and pulled his hat over his eyes with the stern resolution of banishing from his heart and his memory the wife whom he thus abruptly deserted; and very indignant were his feelings when he discovered that however easy it was to order her to leave his house, it was hard to force her from his heart; and though he might resolve to drive her from his imagination, it was quite another thing to put this resolution into effect.

But it was not his lot to be left in silence and solitude to struggle with his own feelings.

Another individual entered the train just before it started, and after depositing a dressing case and carpet-bag under the seat, and arranging the window and blind to his satisfation, this individual turned round to Mr. Cameron, and claimed his acquaintance.

Imagine the indignation and annoyance of the jealous husband, when he heard his name pronounced by the man whom he believed to be his rival, and discovered under the travelling-cap of his companion, the features of Valentine Mountsteven.

A more unwelcome sight could hardly have met his eyes, and the easy assurance, and by no means unhappy expression of that handsome face, as the young soldier extended his hand towards him, almost provoked the merchant into giving him a blow for a bow; and induced him resolutely to fold his arms, and answer his friendly salutation by the curtest, coldest form of words he could devise.

It gratified him extremely to find that Mountsteven drew back with a look of embarrassment and discomposure, evidently both hurt and surprised by his reception. In any other state of mind, to have given pain to a fellow-being, would have distressed Mr. Cameron, and he would have shrunk as much from wounding, as from being wounded himself; but at this moment he was pleased by the effect produced, and he determined to carry on the

same system, during the time they were compelled to remain together. But his determination, as it appeared, was of little avail, when put in competition with the will, the self-possession, and the warm spirit of the young Irishman.

A few moments pause was broken by the latter, who addressed his companion in a manner which defied cold reserve, or angry contempt.

"I really am delighted to see you," was his remark, "because it enables me to explain as I wished to do, some circumstances which have given offence to my—I hardly know whether I may say, *friends*. I am going to Ireland to see my uncle on a six weeks' leave, and I was quite uneasy at leaving misapprehension as to my conduct in *one* quarter; but I knew not how to avoid it—I had no opportunity for explanation; you I trust will bear a message for me to Mrs. Cameron—a message of apology, regret, and I may say also—justification."

Breaking through his resolution not to speak to him, Mr. Cameron replied in a low stern voice,

"Had I been more in the habit of being your

medium of communication with my *wife*, I should probably have been better able to serve you now!"

Mountsteven surveyed him with an air that seemed to imply a doubt of his meaning, and another short pause ensued, which he broke by saying in a tone a little warm, a little proud,

"I fear, Mr. Cameron, you too are offended with me! When I met Mrs. Cameron at the Opera last night, she absolutely refused to listen to my explanation, and openly expressed her anger because I had done what was inevitable. Of course, on a lady, I could not force an explanation, or persist in a justification where my presence was evidently considered an intrusion; but from you, Sir, as a man and a gentleman, I demand a candid and honourable hearing, and a degree of sincerity equal to that with which I am prepared to meet you."

This speech thoroughly mystified Mr. Cameron, so much so, that he felt quite unable to answer it, and his silence allowing his companion time to collect his thoughts, he went on again with little pause.

"Mrs. Cameron declared herself indignant, because I had quarrelled with her cousin, and that with such warmth as to lead to a challenge. Had she known *why* we quarrelled, she would perhaps have transferred her indignation to another object."

"And why *did* you quarrel?" exclaimed the husband, with an abruptness which quite startled his companion.

"Really, Mr. Cameron, there is nothing in the world so difficult as to give an accurate account of an after-dinner quarrel: one never can remember precisely how it begins, or who is most to blame. If that clerk of yours were not Mrs. Cameron's cousin, I should say he was a very mean, unprincipled, good-for-nothing fellow; that was my impression at the time, and it was from my openly expressing that opinion, that he took offence. Why Mrs. Cameron was so angry with me, I cannot make out, even now; she used to *appear*, at least, to dislike him at one time; but, perhaps you can explain, Sir, you probably know from herself what her feelings on the subject were. Did she fancy *I* had taken liberties with her name? or was it only

a woman's dislike to a duellist which made her shrink from me?"

"I know nothing about it," was the merchant's concise reply.

Again Captain Mountsteven looked, with a glance of scrutiny at his face, and seemed considering a moment before he went on.

"I suppose I must understand your answer to mean, that you do not choose to tell me; but if you will not betray her secrets, at least do me the honour to inform me, what has caused *your* change of manner towards me. Have I personally offended you? is it for being ready to fight, or for not fighting? for abusing your clerk, or defending your wife's character? or is there any other crime of which you mentally accuse me, which induces you to look and speak with an unfriendly tone?"

"These sort of suspicions of a change in manner, usually arise from a secret feeling that it is deserved," replied Mr. Cameron; "if therefore, you are altogether so unconscious of having given offence, why torment yourself with suspicions that offence has been taken?"

"I will take you at your word, Mr. Cameron; and I shall consider that we are still on our former amicable terms, since I am ignorant of any reason existing to the contrary. I am going away for six weeks at least, and I shall trust my cause to your hands; pray persuade Mrs. Cameron out of her unreasonable anger, that when we meet again, we may be on the same good terms as ever. She will listen to you, if she will listen to anybody, and I confide in your honour to do me justice."

It was with the very extremity of astonishment, that Mr. Cameron listened to his companion—was it possible that the man who had been insidiously stealing the affections of his wife, could thus address him; could assume the look of unconscious innocence and openness, with which he spoke? If he were in the habit of corresponding with May, he would hardly have required her husband's kind offices to do away with her anger; he would probably have chosen to employ his eloquence on herself. Was it possible that after all, his jealousy had deceived him—that his fears had converted suspicions into

facts, and surmises into certainties—that he had been a dupe, not of his wife, but of Wildey—that he had been absurdly unreasonable, barbarously unjust, cruelly unkind—accusing his innocent wife, without sufficient grounds even to build a doubt on—and forsaking her, without waiting for explanation or justification?

He must try and find out something more certainly about the events of yesterday; he must ascertain how far Mountsteven's account of these hasty transactions agreed with Wildey's; how much May's name had been mixed up in the duel, and what share she had really borne in preventing it.

In as steady a tone as his perturbation permitted, he once more entreated an explanation from the Captain; asserting, which was true enough, that it was impossible for him to undertake a justification, either of his conduct or motives, unless he understood both accurately.

His manner was so much more friendly than before, that the young soldier replied with alacrity; and entered into all the particulars relative to the dinner, and the disagreement; warmly referring to the general impertinence of

Wildey's conduct, and without scruple, asserting that under similar circumstances he should again act as he had done, and defend the character of an absent woman, even at the risk of bloodshed. The account he gave produced an impression considerably at variance with that which Wildey's own story had induced; and had a decided tendency to strengthen Mr. Cameron's occasional suspicions that the clerk had been playing a double game with him.

It was with no small surprise that the husband learned the real story of the appeal to the magistrate; and the consequent interference of the power of the law; it was the first intelligence he had of Arnold's visit to London; and when he discovered that he had been the companion of Mrs. Cameron at the Opera, as well as her agent in the preceding transaction, it greatly modified his opinion of her levity and indecorum. Captain Mountsteven admitted that there was something disagreeably ludicrous in the whole affair. In his calmer moments, it struck him so himself, that he should be challenged by a mere merchant's clerk, and really have contemplated risking his life in giving satisfaction with pistol

and bullets, to one whose weapon should have been a steel pen; and then that this same clerk should betray the secret, and thus allow the police to smother the incipient duel, was too absurd. He really had his doubts as to why Wildey had suffered the secret to escape; whether it was from down-right fear of the event, or from innocent pride at the prospect of fighting with a future peer; whatever was his motive he had revealed the affair to his cousin, and she with the natural impulse of a woman, had told his brother-in-law, and induced him to interpose. Mountsteven had met this Mr. Arnold at the Opera, and had spoken to him, after Mrs. Cameron had retired, or rather had been spoken to by him; and a very queer individual he considered him, a something between a bear and a bandit, slightly tempered down by an infusion of considerable admiration for his wife's cousin, at whose desire, and for whose sake alone, he averred he had taken the trouble of going before the magistrate.

Mr. Arnold, indeed, had coolly told Captain Mountsteven that he considered them both a

couple of asses, but that Wildey had the superiority in having a strong taint of roguery in his folly, a superiority which he, Captain Mountsteven, was quite willing to concede to the clerk. There was something so quaint in the immoveable gravity and cool self-possession with which this Mr. Arnold announced his truly flattering opinion, that though ready enough to be angry in general, he believed, he had found it impossible to be indignant with him; and they had parted on the best possible terms. Arnold, indeed, had invited him to come and shoot snipes with him, in some place which he had in Lincolnshire, Littlemere by name, and he had a great idea that he should run down some day, and pay the extraordinary possessor of this spot a visit.

Visit Littlemere!—go down to the very place whither he had exiled May! Mr. Cameron's breath was gone, or he would have exclaimed, what next? and whilst he was still labouring under the oppression of amazement and alarm, and the Captain diverging from the subject altogether, went off in a discursive monologue, on the topic of shooting in general, and snipe-

shooting in particular, the train stopped, his journey was ended, and almost before he was aware, he found himself standing on the platform at the station, and saw the train vanishing from his sight in the distance.

Sunk in the profoundest meditations, he proceeded to an hotel, where his first occupation was to write a brief letter to Wildey, the receipt of which has already been related. Then he attempted to forget himself, his doubts and his anxieties in the columns of a newspaper, which he perused with a persevering industry that would have been more successful had his attention been equal to his unremitting application.

As it was, however, he did not gather one single distinct idea from the types that danced before his eyes, and had he been examined on the subject, I fear his answers on the political topics of the day would have been extremely unsatisfactory. In the same dreamy state of mind, he ate his dinner, and afterwards sat over his fire, for the evening was chilly to his feelings, sipping his wine, and pondering wearily on things past, present, and future. He could not come to any conclusion on any of the points

which agitated his mind, and his notions if put in words would have seemed strangely vague and contradictory. They ran somewhat in this way.

That puppy, Mountsteven—with all his conceit, his vanity, his unprincipled flirtations, and wicked preference for other men's wives, did not seem after all to have been so bad as he had fancied him. He had some good feelings, too; he had always treated *him* with deference, but then, that perhaps, might be a blind; and he never spoke of May but with respect—except when Wildey had quarrelled with him, and then it appeared it was Wildey who had been disrespectful, and Mountsteven who had resented it; and there was a frankness, a self-possession, a reliance on his good opinion in his manner, very prepossessing, this much even Mr. Cameron found it hard to deny. Ought he then to wonder if May had liked him, or seemed to like him, too; and there was nothing after all in the Captain's manner, which indicated the slightest consciousness of her preference exceeding the bounds which her husband would have wished to set to it. He really was a very pleasing

man, or else he was a dreadful hypocrite. Wildey said the latter; but Wildey, though an excellent fellow, no doubt, he had known that for many years, and firmly attached to himself, was, perhaps, mistaken, or misled by prejudice; it was certainly within the compass of things possible, that Wildey himself was a rogue! There were some circumstances which had gradually intruded on his knowledge, to be accounted for on no other grounds. At a distance from him, Mr. Cameron could leisurely put these facts together into something like a regular form, and he could by reflection and consideration, work out, as the result of the problem, that Wildey was idle, careless, and extravagant; insolent to his inferiors, and unjust. He even suspected him of something like dishonesty, and had serious intentions on his return to London, of devoting himself to examining books, and looking over accounts, to ascertain whether all had really been fair and honest in his business transactions.

The difficulty was to carry out his intentions. At a distance he felt doubt and mistrust, but in

his company, under the influence of his eyes, his voice, his ready glozing speech, he shrank from expressing or acting on his feelings. There was a fascination in the clerk, to him irresistible, and he feared it would end, as it had ended before; he should never find courage to tell him that he dreaded and doubted him.

And yet how gladly would he have been sure that he was treacherous, if by admitting that as a fact, he could but acquit May! And why not believe her innocent? True, it would make himself appear as a monster unworthy of her love, but to think her still the angel he had once believed her, he would willingly have submitted to this conviction. He would bear any amount of mortification, he would sacrifice any degree of personal comfort, to be convinced, really, honestly convinced that he had wronged her, that she deserved his love.

Nearly all through the night, and on the ensuing morning, as he sat at breakfast, waiting with nervous impatience for the post to come in, these feelings occupied his mind, and harassed him almost to desperation. Then he suddenly

remembered that there would be no letters for him, and that through the whole of that dreary day he should have no business to occupy him, no friend to speak to, nothing to do, but to torment himself. He envied the waiter who brought him his breakfast; *he* was in a hurry, *he* had no time to spare, somebody was calling *him*. How thankful Mr. Cameron would be, could he suppose it even remotely possible that any one would ask for him. Well, the day must be passed in some way, and he strolled out in the forenoon to visit some of the celebrated manufactories of the town, and to try to forget his troubles in watching the construction of papier-maché tea-trays, or fancy buttons.

Hours pass, however heavily; and weary, dispirited, unsettled in mind and purpose, dreading the solitary evening and the restless night, Mr. Cameron returned to his hotel, rather late in the afternoon. He was considerably surprised on being told that an individual had been inquiring for him. Somebody asking for him? The very thing he had wished for. So weary was he of his own thoughts, of his own com-

pany, that he felt as if he could welcome anything to break their monotony, and would rather have bad news than none at all.

The messenger, when he was introduced, proved to be a young man of respectable appearance, and his errand was to place in Mr. Cameron's hands certain letters and papers directed to him. As the merchant had not expected these things to be forwarded by a special messenger, he was rather surprised that Wildey, from whom he supposed they came, had considered it necessary to adopt this course; he examined their exteriors with attention, and then desiring the bearer to be seated, he proceeded to open the largest of the packets.

To his astonishment, he found under the envelope a small box, such as is commonly used for jewels, and a note in a female hand. A good deal puzzled what to make of this, he hastily perused the note, which contained these words:

"Sir,

"When you presented me with the enclosed

bracelet, you desired me, if at any time I needed your assistance, to return it to you, and pledged yourself to stand my friend on such an appeal. Trusting therefore, to your promise, I venture to solicit an interview with you as soon as possible. It is with regret that I intrude on your recollection, but the circumstances admit of no delay.

"Your obliged and humble servant,

"GRACE DUNSFORD."

When he had run his eye over this note, he turned a scrutinizing glance at the bearer; the young man was apparently engrossed by the contemplation of a painting, representing some famous hunter taking a flying leap, and evinced neither interest nor anxiety about Mr. Cameron's emotions.

The merchant inquired eagerly who sent him, but he was not much enlightened by his answer. He had received directions to travel down to Birmingham, and give those papers into Mr. Cameron's hands, from the junior partner of their firm, Mr. Thomson: nor did he know whether he had had previous communication

with Mr. Cameron's head clerk or not—perhaps; but such things did not come under his cognisance; he was a very junior clerk himself, and though Mr. Thomson was his cousin, he did not explain to him his reasons for acting.

Mr. Cameron turned over the letters again and again; there was nothing to indicate what connection the Thomsons had with them or him; a letter from Wildey would perhaps explain. There was one; he hastily read it.

"Dear Sir,

"In reply to your favour of yesterday, I beg to state that Mrs. Cameron left your house for Littlemere on Friday afternoon, where I understand she intends to remain, until she hears your wishes on the subject. No papers of importance have come to hand.

"Your obedient servant,

"JAMES WILDEY."

No explanation here; all was mystery, and the only way to clear it up seemed to be to

proceed at once to London. In fact, his promise to Grace bound him to that, and he was not sorry to have some positive call on him; some summons which at once settled the path of duty.

He learned that the young clerk would return to town that night; he determined to go, too; if Grace Dunsford were really in distress no time should be lost in relieving her, and he should therefore make a point of seeking her out early on Sunday morning, and learning what assistance she stood in need of. He well remembered that promise; in fact, he had never forgotten it, and the circumstance of her having never resorted to him to claim his help, had induced him to believe that assistance had never been required.

He had not unfrequently entertained internal misgivings as to the policy of dismissing from his service, several of the clerks whom Wildey had turned off; and he had on this account, as well as on several others, greatly regretted the sort of despotic power which that wily individual had established over him. But he had

always flattered himself that the annuity which he had settled on old Ashton, would preserve him from want, and that the young man would procure another situation, he had never doubted. Had he not done so, had there been any distress or difficulty, of course they would have applied to him; for though he had been led to believe Harry was occasionally careless, and had been induced to suffer his dismissal, the affair had been so managed by Wildey, as to leave the merchant entirely unconscious of the bitter feeling of injustice and hard usage, raised in the minds of the two sufferers. He had trusted to his clerk an affair from which he shrank as painful, and had satisfied himself by desiring that it might be done in the mildest and kindest manner. He never could bear finding fault himself; and Wildey's artful expressions of regret at the necessity pressed on them, had convinced him that everything possible would be done to alleviate their feelings.

Latterly, indeed, engrossed by his own domestic affairs, he had not often thought of the

expelled clerks at all, but now that he was himself unhappy, he felt more inclined to sympathize with them; and he was thankful to have any subject of interest to occupy his mind, even for a few hours, which might turn his thoughts from the sickening perplexities which surrounded his private arrangements.

There was just time to take a hasty dinner before the train by which they were to travel would be there; and having invited Mr. Thomson's clerk to join him at the meal, they sat down together. Mr. Cameron, still in hopes of discovering what connection they had with his affairs, was kind and encouraging to the young man, and he being naturally communicative, talked a good deal about the firm; and after some time, the merchant fancied that he had found some clue to the mystery, for he discovered that Mr. Arnold of Littlemere was one of the partners, although not an active one in the concern.

It was singular that he should again meet with this person's name, as in some way connected with his affairs. Young Thomson knew he had been in town, he had been at

saying a good deal, for he thought, (at least report said so,) that poor Harry Dunsford had been most unkindly, and unfairly treated in a certain house, from which he was dismissed to gratify private spite entertained by some people who had great influence with Mr. Cameron, the rich city merchant.

His auditor sipped his wine, and then said calmly, that he should like to know who these people were; for it was always a good thing to learn what was said of one, as it might serve to amend errors, or rectify mistakes.

Harry Dunsford, it appeared, was a great friend of Fred Thomson's, and he was inclined to take up his cause rather warmly. Report said, that the head-clerk, one Wildey by name, was either his personal enemy from the first, or became so from the influence of his cousin, the beautiful Mrs. Cameron. Here the merchant looked up so astonished at his companion, and exclaimed so emphatically, "Take care what you say," that Fred Thomson felt obliged to remind him that he was not talking to the husband of the said beautiful Mrs. Cameron,

but to one who was to be considered as a total stranger to all concerned.

Mr. Cameron admitting this fact, the narrator went on.

Why Mrs. Cameron had quarrelled with Mrs. Dunsford nobody knew; they had been great friends once; but Harry was very close about such affairs, and they had only guess work to go on. Be the cause what it might, Harry and his father-in-law had been sent to the right about, and he thought his listener would be surprised to hear that the latter had been forty years or more in the house, and was dismissed without any pension or reward for his long services. He was helpless now, paralytic and imbecile, dependent on his daughter, and the whole family had been much distressed. That, however, he hoped was over for the present; old Arnold had taken them by the hand so kindly that they would be sure to do well; *he* was not a man to forget a deserving fellow, and Harry was one who would merit kindness, and would reward by his good conduct those who befriended him.

The oddest part of the business was, that

Arnold, it appears, had married the sister of the very same James Wildey who had so abused his power and influence; and he had it from George Ashton himself that he had brought Mrs. Cameron to their lodgings and made it all up with her; a circumstance which, he added with a sly glance, he imagined her husband did not know, as he understood he had left town that very day.

Mr. Cameron considered a little while, and then observed that a great deal of what he had heard was quite new to him, and in some parts he fancied the narrator was mistaken; but one thing he wanted to know, did he, Fred Thomson, know what he had brought down to him that afternoon?

Of course not; he knew nothing of the contents of the letters, or packets; he had nothing to do but to deliver them; and now, had they not better be moving; the train would be up in ten minutes.

Mr. Cameron assented, and all things being ready, they left for the railroad, and before very long, were steaming across the country as fast as fire and water could propel them. There was

a great deal to occupy the merchant's mind during the journey: what he had just heard threw quite a new light on past events. How strangely his affairs seemed to turn out; how constantly those with whom he had no connection overruled his conduct and directed his measures! He was a puppet in the hands of others—a tool, an engine. Well, be it so; he suspected he had lost the right to guide himself by using it absurdly; and it was all very well to find others who would take the trouble from him. He must wait now, at all events, and see what new turn things were about to take; he would see Mrs. Dunsford, and he had a strong foreboding that seeing her would be in some way connected with May, or would lead to some communication with her. He well remembered their former friendship, and May's eager, though ignorant defence of Harry; he could recall also how grave she had looked when the decision had been formed to dismiss him, and he could not believe that she had wished or prompted it.

How Arnold, of whom since their marriage he had seldom heard, came to have such influence with her, and how it could be in his power so to

interfere, that Wildey's letter and the documents from the counting-house all came by his messenger, as he doubted not Fred Thomson was, was the profoundest mystery. The more he endeavoured to put together the different ideas which floated in his mind, so as to form one whole, the less they seemed to fit each other. One thing was certain, May was gone away, and he should find the house empty and desolate. Should he go there when he reached London? No, he would go to a hotel, keep his arrival concealed from Wildey, see Grace, seek an interview with Arnold, and try to discover what May's real feelings and intentions were.

If he could trace out all the intricacies which now presented themselves, perhaps, and how his heart throbbed at the idea, Wildey might be a villain, but May would be innocent. With this hope to lead him, to spirit him on, he could thread a whole labyrinth of perplexities, and would endure any amount of personal trouble or humiliation, thinking himself richly repaid could he but once more secure the right to think well of the wife whom he still so tenderly loved.

CHAPTER V.

ORL. If ever you have looked on better days,
If ever been where bells have knolled to church,
If ever sat at any good man's feast,
If ever from your eyelids wiped a tear,
And know what 'tis to pity and be pitied—
Let gentleness my strong enforcement be.

AS YOU LIKE IT.

MORNING found Mr. Cameron still in the same mind, and when he had breakfasted, he set off to walk to Holborn to discover the locality from which Mrs. Dunsford's note was dated. Some trifling circumstances which occurred to delay him, prevented his reaching the place until after eleven o'clock, and he felt considerable doubts

as to whether he should find her within. The bells of the many steeples had ceased their call to prayers; the long strings of people hastening to worship had been swallowed up in the churches; the streets were comparatively quiet and solitary. He expected to find that Grace Dunsford too would be at church, and he was just deciding what he should do in that case, when he reached her lodgings. His knock was speedily answered; the door was opened, to his great satisfaction, by Grace herself, who started and coloured a little on seeing him, and almost forgot to ask him to walk in.

The rest of the family were, with the exception of course of Mr. Ashton, gone to church, and on his asking to speak to her, she led him into the little back parlour, and closing the door, stood before him in silent emotion. Grace, at this moment, was contending with a variety of feelings; grateful affection, and a sense of injustice, pecuniary obligations and great injuries coming as she believed from the same hand; and a strong sense of embarrassment at the part she had now to play, kept her silent and hesitating, doubtful what to say.

dear; and am quite ready to fulfil my promise to the utmost of my power; what is it you require?"

"It is a great favour," said Grace softly, and turning round the bracelet as she spoke, without looking up.

"I am glad of it, my dear! do not hesitate to ask it, anything you need you shall have, if I can give it—speak, is it money or interest you wish for?"

"Neither, Sir, I should not, I hope, ever be be so mean as to beg for money, and after your liberality to my father, least of all of you—oh no!"

"Well, well; money would be the easiest thing to give; of least consequence to me, cause least exertion; but what is it then—something for yourself?"

"Not exactly for myself personally; what I I would ask is for another."

"For the little one to come?" said Mr. Cameron, "shall I be his godfather, too?"

"Oh no," replied the young wife, blushing more deeply, "for a friend—a dear, dear friend —or I may say for two—to secure the happi-

ness of two people, whom I sincerely love and esteem; will you listen? may I speak?" looking up at him with great animation.

"Of course; do not hesitate; I came here on purpose."

"Then read that note as a preliminary;" she put into his hand a little note, and eagerly watched his countenance as he unfolded it. She saw him glance at the signature, and date, change colour and look excited. His hand trembled, and his features expressed interest and emotion; but not displeasure. She was certain that he was not angry, and her courage rose. He read—

"You will be surprised, dearest Grace, when you read this to learn that I am far away: I little thought when we parted this morning, we should soon be so widely separated, and you will be more than surprised, I know, when you learn the reason. Oh, Grace, I am half broken-hearted at the change; Mr. Arnold will tell you all: spare me—you know I have not quite deserved this. I have trifled with my happiness, and lost it; worn out the forbearance, the

love of the kindest, the most indulgent of husbands, and he casts me off; but indeed, I am certain that he is acting under a delusion; I have been vain and careless, petulant and foolish, never even in thought criminal. But to you I need not make protestations; *you*, dear, will not condemn me; only tell me what I ought to do, and I will follow your advice. Shall I write to my husband, he forbids me! shall I wait till time, accident, chance clears my character—tell me, for I know not what will be wisest and best. Mr. Arnold must arrange your affairs. I hope to send George to school again, but at present you may well believe I hardly know what I *can* do. If I continue at Littlemere, you must let Julia and Sarah visit me there. I shall soon write all—meantime adieu, dearest friend—had I followed your counsels this would not have happened.

"MAY CAMERON."

Once, twice, and again the husband read this note before he raised his eyes, or spoke. There was a softening expression, an agitation, a something so like a tear in his eyes, that

Grace looked away, and occupied herself in once more placing the bracelet in the morocco case, and arranging its golden links symmetrically on the white velvet bed.

"And did Mr. Arnold tell you all?" at last ejaculated he.

"Yes," replied Grace; his voice betrayed so much emotion that she still refrained from looking at him.

"He told you that I had behaved like an old fool, an idiot, a brute then I suppose, and had forfeited all title to be considered a rational being."

"Oh, no, indeed. He told me May had been greatly distressed; a little angry and proud at first, as any woman would be, when unjustly accused; but afterwards very patient and calm and humble. That though aware how it would injure her reputation, if it became known that you had—had—"

"Turned her out of my house," suggested he as Grace hesitated; she went on—

"She yet said she would obey you at any sacrifice, trusting perhaps to the certainty that some day you would do her justice. She knew

she had been wrong; but not so wrong as to preclude forgiveness. Oh, Mr. Cameron, how could you think, even for a moment, that your own, your beautiful May, your wife, with all her high sense of honour, and her noble feelings, her candour, her thousand good qualities could make herself, what we dare not even name, could sacrifice you, herself, everything for—you must know it is impossible!"

Mr. Cameron sighed, and did not answer.

Grace went on; she told him how May had sought her on Friday morning, had confided in her, had detailed to her, all her sorrows, her follies, her regrets; how she had left her full of good resolutions, determined to speak openly to her husband, to explain the past, and amend the future. And then suddenly turning to her auditor, she added,

"And now for my request. For the sake of your wife, for your own sake, and for your promise made to me, go to her, and bring her back to your house!"

"Tell me one thing, Grace," replied he, "did she tell you to plead her cause?"

"Oh no!"

"Did this Mr. Arnold, then?"

"No, I suggested it to him, but he approved of it fully!"

"And he sent me the bracelet which brought me back to you?"

"Yes, I did not know where you were gone; he found out for me, and undertook the charge of it."

"How came he to know?"

"I believe he learned from Mr. Wildey; he has had a great deal of communication with him."

"Then this plan of getting me back again was concocted between you three?" said Mr. Cameron interrogatively.

"Oh no, indeed! I do not imagine Mr. Wildey ever heard a syllable about it, and from what Mr. Arnold told me, I have no idea that he expected you in town. Indeed, I am sure he would not wish it at all!"

"Not wish it, why not?"

"Because I believe, from what I have learned, both from Mr. Arnold, and from dear

May herself, that his objcct all along had been to embroil you with your wife, or at least, to make some kind of mischief. I hope I do not wrong him very much, but I cannot help thinking his acts have had far more to do with your misunderstandings than anything else!"

"No, you are unjust, Grace; you think he injured your husband, and, like a true woman, you suppose him capable of any kind of villainy; but though I am aware that his sense of his cousin's faults — mistakes—whatever name you would call them by is acute, I am sure he would not injure her for the world. That for which I blamed May, for which I must still blame her, is what my own eyes have seen, and which has been too deeply impressed on my memory to forget. Would that I could forget it!" turning away as he spoke with a shuddering expression, as if the remembrance of her errors were productive of most painful sensations. "I would give all the world to be deceived again, entirely, completely deceived, into the belief that she entertained regard, affection for me, valued my honour, and dearer, more

important still, her own; but, Grace, that can never be. I never can forget—I was deceived, and now my eyes are open. It cannot be again!"

"Indeed," cried Grace, warmly, "you never were more completely deceived in your life, if you now doubt her integrity, her honour, and still more, her regard for you. Excuse my boldness, dear Sir, but when I see that you are throwing away both her happiness and your own, from a delusion, I cannot forbear speaking warmly. I owe you much, so much that I would gladly prove my gratitude by any act in my power. I am but the little mouse, and you are like the ensnared lion; though I could not return you benefits in kind, I will at least try to free you from the mistakes which seem to surround you like a net; and if I cannot do so, it shall be from want of power, not want of good will. Only do not, by your impatience, and your wilful struggles, draw the knots tighter, and make my task more difficult."

"You, at least, are a good girl," replied Mr. Cameron, patting her shoulder, "and I

thank you for interesting yourself in my happiness."

"Such thanks do not satisfy me," replied Grace, taking his hand in her's. "It is that you should act on my words that I wish; nothing short of that will satisfy me."

"What do you want me to do, child?"

"Give your wife the opportunity of explaining the past, of clearing up what seems suspicious, and, in short, of being heard in her own justification. Why should you condemn her without trial? Is it just and fair? is it what you promised her? is it as you would wish to be treated yourself? Oh, Mr. Cameron, will it, when you come to lie on your death-bed, will it give you satisfaction then to reflect that you hastily banished from your house your young and beautiful wife—"

"For treachery, infidelity. Grace, can *you* plead for these crimes?"

"They are not proved; it is a mere suspicion; an accusation, for aught you know, without a foundation. Could I suppose her guilty, I would not plead for her to you; I should then plead with herself, and try to move

her heart; but I am convinced this is not the case, and therefore I dare to name her to you. Do not you see and feel, that in harshly driving her from you, in depriving her of your protection, your counsel, the shelter of your roof, and the shield which a husband's presence always throws round a wife, you expose her to the greatest risk; you tempt her, if it were possible she should, to incur the very guilt with which you charge her; you increase her danger in a tenfold degree; and you do this to the woman whom you have sworn to love and to cherish till death. You cannot, you never could really mean to do this. You will see her and forgive her, and make her happy again."

"If I were to seek her now, and see her again, and listen to her words, I should not be able to resist her, I know that well enough. My heart would yield, whilst my judgment condemned my weakness; and I should become a scorn to myself, and meriting the scorn of others. She would triumph, and I should be wretched."

"No, you would not; this idea only haunts you because you will persist in doubting her faith to you; but see her, listen to her, and she will explain all the past. I own she has been foolish, thoughtless, trifling; I am very far from defending the whole of her conduct, but time, prudence, affection, and mild remonstrances from you, would have far more power of reforming her than harshness and hasty measures."

"I have lost my confidence in her!"

"I did not think that you had been so obdurate, so unjust, Mr. Cameron. But I will not take a refusal; you are bound by your promise to me, you own yourself bound to grant my request; I ask of you to see her, to hear her once more; tell her, her fault between her and you alone, and if she hear you, you have saved your wife. Dear Mr. Cameron, give me this satisfaction; it may be the last favour I shall ask of any one; perhaps, my days here may be very few, but when the hour of pain and trial comes, give me the relief of thinking that she and you are happy."

Mr. Cameron was silent and thoughtful. It was another of those contradictions and inconsistencies, to which all are liable, that he had so stoutly resisted a reconciliation with his wife; he had been wishing for it before, had desired nothing so much; had only wanted, as he thought, an excuse for forgiving her; and yet, when Grace began to plead, he hardened his heart, recalled all her offences, dwelt again in idea on her supposed preference for the handsome Mountsteven; pictured to himself the ridicule which would attach to the easy, credulous old husband, who allowed himself to be misled and blinded by the arts of his young wife, and shrank from the picture his imagination drew.

She sat looking at him, trembling, excited, disappointed; not knowing what more to say; fearing at once to say too much or too little; uncertain whether another word might not entirely alienate his heart, or might at once melt it to mercy. At length, he spoke.

"If you had asked anything for yourself, Grace, I would not have hesitated a moment;

I would have given you money, time, anything you required, either for you or for your family. Do you want to send George to school? you need not depend on May—I will be responsible for that. Julia and Sarah, too—they shall all be educated; I have no children of my own to care for, let me once more find an interest in providing for *your* family. Accept this as the fulfilment of my promise, and do not ask alone what cannot be granted."

"No," replied Grace, "I will not. I do not want your help for brother or sister; we can provide for them ourselves; and were they dependent on you, Mr. Cameron, who knows but that some day you might cast them off also, and leave them in a worse position than you found them? It is better for them that they endure a struggle early in life, and practice self-exertion and self-denial; that they learn to put their trust in the blessings of Providence, given to all who exert themselves with industry, perseverance, and cheerful confidence."

"And you refuse my assistance? Consider

before you answer. Decide, not for yourself, but for your brothers and sisters. Commute your request into advancement, wealth, everything you could wish for them; I will freely give it—all, and more than you would ask. Take this, and cease to plead for one who does not merit it, and cannot be so dear as your own family."

"No, I will not. You may go back from your word, and deny me the only thing I ask; but I will not take the alternative. What blessings could come with riches so given? Such wealth would be a curse; it would be the price of a dear friend's disgrace, unhappiness, perhaps her ruin. No, I will make no compromise to such an effect. I love you, and I love May, and I wish for nothing so much as your happiness. Nothing less than this will satisfy me. Grant, or refuse my one request. I make no other."

Mr. Cameron looked at her for some minutes in silence, but his eyes were moist.

"Good, noble-hearted girl!" said he, at last.

"I will tempt you no farther. Do not think me very harsh and cruel if I still hesitate. But I will think, consider, reflect upon it. I cannot yield merely to feeling and emotion. I must be convinced that I am right, but I will not resist the conviction; and you shall be no loser, Grace, by your generous friendship."

He rose as he spoke.

"I am going back to the hotel now—there is my address, if you require it. I do not want Wildey to know I am in town; but I shall try and see this Arnold, who has so largely interested himself in my affairs; and by and bye I will let you know my decision. I shall be anxious to hear of your welfare, Grace, let one of the children send me a line when you are safe, under cover to Arnold, if you do not know *my* address. Good-bye, my child; take care of yourself."

She kissed his hand, with tears in her eyes, and he, with almost as much emotion, hastily withdrew.

On leaving Mrs. Dunsford the merchant did

with precision on their appropriate places, the chairs pushed back against the wall, or placed with a regard to right angles and straight lines consistent with the most mathematical mind. In short, the housemaid here reigned supreme, and easy elegance was banished.

On the table lay an envelope directed to himself. He caught it up. It was his wife's handwriting. He feared, he trembled to open it. He had set himself against Grace's mediation, because he could not bear that another should interfere, not because he did not secretly wish for a reconciliation. He hoped that the first advances would come from May, not because he was too proud to make them himself, but because he fancied that concession on her part would be the result of innocence. With him, unless indeed her innocence were previously proved, he considered concession would be weakness; and he was longing to find some proof that she could justify herself. He held the letter in his hand, and contemplated the address, before he mustered courage to break the seal. At length he did; and dropping on the table the key which it inclosed, he hastily

room, containing only the words, "kept for remembrance."

He put down the box, and sank into a reverie, the result of which was that he determined to see Arnold the next day, and perhaps—but what was to spring from this measure, he could not exactly see.

There was something very wrong somewhere, and somebody was very much to blame. Of this he felt tolerably certain; but whether it were May, or Wildey, Mountsteven, or Arnold, or himself, he could not at that moment decide. Somebody had been deceived, somebody had been ill-used; there must have been treachery or injustice somewhere, but how he was to discover the culprit, or punish the guilty was another problem beyond his faculties to work out, although he harassed his brain incessantly on all these points.

After spending an hour or two in his own house, he returned to the hotel, where he had established himself. He attended service in the nearest church that afternoon: he afterwards ate his dinner, and then lying down on the sofa, fell asleep, still tormented by doubts and in-

soluble questions, which even disturbed his dreams, and waking or sleeping allowed him neither rest nor comfort.

Arnold was already aware that Mr. Cameron had arrived in London; but as he was anxious to finish some arrangements with Wildey, he avoided seeing the merchant at present, though fully resolved to give him a meeting on Monday, when his other affairs were brought to a satisfactory conclusion.

The hours which Mr. Cameron had passed in the railway, on Saturday evening, had been devoted by Wildey's indefatigable brother-in-law, to arranging his complicated difficulties. Convinced that in this instance, honesty would certainly be the best policy, the merchant's clerk gave a full, true and particular account of his debts and dilemmas. Arnold was cold, sarcastic, and severe, but then he seemed disposed really to help him through everything; he was evidently as liberal with his money as with his censure, or his advice; and the more Wildey felt convinced that this was an opportunity never to be repeated, the more anxious he naturally was to profit, as far as possible, by the unexpected help. Arnold

seemed already so fully convinced that his brother-in-law was a consummate rogue, that a few revelations of treachery, more or less, were likely to make little difference in his opinion, and the only satisfaction left to Wildey in his present humiliation, besides the very evident and tangible one of being helped over his difficulties, was that of proving that if he were a rogue, he was at least a clever one, and deserved some admiration for his mental, if not for his moral endowments.

Master of all his affairs, and holding in his hands the existence of Wildey's character, and the secret on which alone depended the enjoyment of his country and liberty, Arnold could, of course, dictate what terms he pleased to the culprit. It required all Wildey's resolution, and the utmost patience that he could muster, quietly to see the advantages for which he had so long toiled, slipping away from his grasp.

To withdraw from the fashionable circles into which he had intruded himself; to relinquish all hope of making a speedy fortune by his speculations, and once more to submit to the

himself from unwelcome control, and by some new series of intrigue, or some more successful speculations on his part, he might succeed in regaining all he had so rapidly lost.

It would be impossible for Arnold to be always watching him; he should certainly have some means of once more raising himself; secure of Mr. Cameron's confidence, he should still have opportunities of regulating *his* thoughts and projects; he might, little by little, regain a footing in his house, and once more become the friend of his cousin. Nay, perhaps, his present humiliation might, after all, serve but as an advantageous starting point to begin a fresh career. He saw now clearly, in his retrospection of the last six months, how ill he had played his game, so far as she was concerned. Instead of attempting to win her by subtle flattery, by crafty advances, and by stooping to conquer, he had presumed too far on his position; he had advanced too boldly, too roughly, had alarmed, irritated, and repelled, where he ought to have conciliated; and thus he had lost ground by every movement.

Now he would begin afresh, on a totally new principle. In the first place, he would lay before her the effusions of a heart, broken by the pain he had so unintentionally caused her; he would condemn himself; he would be humble, penitent, miserable, hopeless; he would work on her generous feelings by the most candid confession of error, and on her tenderness by the bitterest expressions of remorse. He would excite her pity; and thus he should once more find a way to her heart; nothing should console him for the past; no forgiveness should convince him he was pardoned; no kindness should mitigate his self-reproach; and neither time, nor assurances of affection, should ever soften his woe, nor raise him from his deep self-abasement.

May was always generous and noble-minded; perhaps this would be the very line of conduct to touch her feelings; and after all, he might conquer!

Such was the vision with which he soothed his feelings, whilst he entered into the arrangements which Arnold proposed, and agreed to everything which he dictated. He made no

objections, started no difficulties, and even consented to receive into the counting-house, if Mr. Cameron wished it, (and Arnold assured him that Mr. Cameron certainly would wish it,) an extra clerk, whom his brother-in-law could confidently recommend. Wildey knew very well what this meant; he knew that the new clerk was to be a check on him, a spy, an informer, he supposed, in case he departed from his recent promises, and he agreed to it all as joyfully as if it had been the very thing of all others he most wished; the arrangement most peculiarly suited to his taste, and desirable for his advantage.

Arnold made no audible demonstrations of mistrust, and therefore Wildey believed he had quite deceived him; he supposed him perfectly satisfied with his acquiescence, and fully depending on his veracity. Arnold, however, knew *him* better; he read deceit in his eye, and the willingness with which he yielded to these suggestions, of necessity irksome and distasteful, convinced the shrewd and watchful observer, that there was some latent plan in

his mind by which Wildey still hoped to overreach him.

Forewarned, however, is forearmed; and Arnold was determined not to throw away his money, without securing some part of the advantages he proposed to himself. Perhaps there was something almost Quixotic in thus devoting such large sums to such an object; but Arnold was a whimsical man, and held the opinion that money is only good for what it can purchase; in itself, and unemployed, being worse than useless. He considered the objects to be gained quite worth the risk; many people would not; but *that* is a mere difference of taste. Had he been able to view with calm and philosophical indifference, the detection, the trial, the conviction, and the transportation of his wife's brother, he need not have endeavoured to save him. It would have made no difference in the outward aspect of his domestic hearth, except, perhaps, in the saddened looks of his wife; his fire would have blazed as brightly; his arm-chair would have been as soft and springy; his green-house would have

flourished; his plantations would have thriven as well, had James Wildey spent the next ten years in Norfolk Island; or removed himself to America for life; the only difference would have been in Arnold's own feelings, and these interested him for the culprit. In the same way, it could not greatly concern him whether Mr. and Mrs. Cameron were perpetually estranged from each other, or were reunited; excepting that in the former case, May would become an inmate of her uncle's house at Littlemere, which, as she was a great favourite of Mr. Arnold's, one might have supposed that gentleman would have liked. And yet he chose to exert himself, with wonderful zeal and pertinacity, to bring about an explanation, and a reconciliation, and cared no more for the money it cost him, than for the trouble it occasioned. As I observed before, there is nothing so extraordinary as the human mind, and nothing I most firmly believe, so unnatural, or at least, so uncommon, as perfect consistency in action.

On Monday morning, Arnold sought Wildey,

and whilst he laid before him the cheques which were to release him from his present embarrassments, he also presented a letter which he required him to copy and sign; on this condition, and this only, the money was his.

The letter was short; this was its greatest recommendation, for it was by no means sweet. Wildey made a wry face as he perused it, and ejaculated:

"On my honour, Arnold, you drive a hard bargain!"

"Hum!" was the only answer of his kind brother-in-law.

Wildey read it again; this time aloud.

"'Sir,

"'It is with regret that I inform you, (that is true enough,) that I have misled and deceived you,' (do let me put in inadvertently?)"

But to this request Arnold only answered with an exclamation of "Fudge!" so Wildey went on.

"'With regard to some circumstances re-

lative to Mrs. Cameron'—I would much rather call her *my cousin*, that has a softening sound!"

"He knows the relationship," coldly observed Arnold, "let it stand, and go on."

"'The blame which I threw on her, I sincerely believe she never deserved, and I hereby most distinctly retract the same. Also, I feel obliged to inform you (true again) that in the affair of the intended duel, I alone was in fault, (no, no, Lord Marcus was in fault, too, I assure you,) and that the conduct of Captain Mountsteven was such as you must have approved, had you been present.'"

Here Wildey again broke off abruptly, and throwing down the paper, he exclaimed:

"I cannot say that—he called me a liar and a villain!"

"Well, I dare say he believed what he said!" was Arnold's reply. "Go on to the end."

"You are too bad; I might have left out all about the duel, or only told old Cameron it did not concern him or his wife."

"Go on, I say!"

Wildey resumed.

"'Convinced of this, I hasten to retract my errors, and with the most sincere contrition for the same, and for the pain my mistakes have occasioned you,

"'I remain, &c.'"

"Well, what do you think of that last sentence?" demanded Arnold, fixing his eyes on Wildey, as he paused.

"Oh, that's all well enough; if I am to apologize, I am ready to do it handsomely; one cannot say less than that."

"Now, in my opinion, if you write your name to that last sentence, you will put it to as great a lie as any individual ever committed to paper; and that is saying a good deal, too, when one remembers all the assurances so often made. But, on my word, I do not believe any canvassing M.P., any Cabinet Minister, or even any Lord of the Admiralty, ever gave his name to an assertion more purely fabulous than this of your contrition for your faults."

"You are unjust in the extreme. I really am sorry for what has occurred."

"Yes, for your failures—but not for your faults. Wildey, I know you well. However, copy that paper, and sign it. I must take it away with me."

"Where to?"

"Never you mind. You must write to Mrs. Cameron, too; but I will not dictate that; I leave you to your own discretion. She is pretty well acquainted with your value."

Wildey was compelled to acquiesce, but whilst making the copy, his head was running on the question he had last asked, together with the query, was Mr. Cameron in London, and if so, what would be the result to him? Since, however, Mr. Arnold would not solve these questions, he had nothing but time to trust to; and, with unpleasant feelings in his heart, in spite of his cordial looks, and words of grateful acknowledgement, he saw his brother-in-law depart with the certificate of his penitence carefully buttoned up in his pocket.

CHAPTER VI.

IMOGEN. Why did you throw your wedded lady from you?

CYMBELINE.

ARNOLD had been rather disappointed on learning from Grace Dunsford the small success which had attended her efforts in May's favour. He had hoped more from her influence and earnest friendship. However, on hearing all the particulars, he began to perceive why she had failed, and to form a correct estimate of Mr. Cameron's disposition. He laid his own plans accordingly, and finding that Mr. Cameron intended to seek an interview, he waited patiently for the merchant's appearance, lest he

should again excite his hostility by a too apparent interference.

It was not very long after his return to his own lodgings, that he received a note from Mr. Cameron, begging him to name some time for an interview at his house in Hyde Park Gardens; and carrying his own answer, he found that gentleman had just arrived there himself, and concluded, from what the servants said, that there he intended to remain.

There was a considerable degree of embarrassment and agitation visible at first in the manners of the old merchant; they had not met, he observed, with some little nervousness, since the day they parted at Littlemere; an eventful day for them both.

Arnold calmly acquiesced, and did not follow up the subject. The memory of his wedding-day did not seem to overpower him, either with painful or pleasurable emotions; he reviewed the act with calm philosophy.

Mr. Cameron had to start a new subject. Considering that he had actually invited Arnold to the interview, it was a little odd that he

should appear so much at a loss for a topic of conversation. His companion was evidently waiting to hear what was the particular object of the meeting, and consequently made no great efforts to supply the blanks in the discourse.

After a little silent reflection, Mr. Cameron began.

"You have been very kind to the Dunsfords, Mr. Arnold."

"It is my cousin that has engaged him in his counting-house," replied the other, rather curtly, and with a look of surprise.

"On your recommendation?" said Mr. Cameron, interrogatively.

"I had his character from James Wildey," answered Arnold, with a peculiar expression.

Mr. Cameron looked surprised, but after a momentary hesitation, he observed that he was glad of it. Wildey had no doubt been pleased to procure Harry a good situation; they were old friends, and, though forced to dismiss him himself, he was too kind-hearted not to exert himself for his sake

"He exerted himself to answer my questions," observed Arnold.

"How strangely false reports are circulated!" remarked Mr. Cameron, thoughtfully; "I heard quite accidentally that Wildey was accused of great injustice and cruelty towards Harry Dunsford; and although I did not believe it, I am delighted that it is proved to be false. But I hope his partiality did not mislead him. I trust he candidly informed you *why* Dunsford was compelled to leave my service?"

"Yes," replied Arnold, calmly; "I believe he did. James Wildey and I have established a very good understanding together, and are quite open on the subject of his concerns. No concealments there!"

"I am glad you do him justice," said Mr. Cameron, warmly; "to say the truth, I have been a little doubtful sometimes about him myself. I hate to think ill of any one; I would much rather think myself mistaken; and I am now persuaded that I was. I can only excuse myself by saying that false reports raise

false impressions, and create suspicions quite unnecessarily."

"Perfectly true, my dear Sir. Hundreds of false reports are daily circulated, which cause most unnecessary discomfort to those who listen to them, and sometimes occasion grievous family disputes and divisions. One learns however, gradually to make due allowance for exaggeration and mistakes, and to judge for one's self."

Mr. Cameron looked down, then looked up, and fidgetted a good deal in his easy chair; then he cleared his throat, and seemed going to say something very particular; but he did not, and another silence prevailed. At last, however, he said:

"Were you speaking generally, or alluding to some particular instance, Sir?"

"Generally and particularly too, there was a case in point in my mind."

As he stopped abruptly, and Mr. Cameron, who was longing to introduce the topic of May and his own affairs, firmly believed that was what he was alluding to, he inquired earnestly what it was.

"A matter that occurred at Littlemere, a month or two ago; about draining the large pond, and Farmer Coker's opinion. You would hardly care to hear the story, Sir."

Mr. Cameron's change of countenance quite bore out his words, that he would not.

Arnold, who watched him closely, was convinced that there was a subject on his mind which he was longing to discuss, but had not courage to begin.

Presently, however, he did venture to say,

"As I travelled down to Birmingham on Friday, I fell in with an acquaintance of yours, Mr. Arnold. It is odd how people meet on the railroad; it was Captain Mountsteven."

"I cannot call him my acquaintance," said Arnold carelessly.

"I thought you knew something of him, had you not something to do with—with an affair in which he was concerned?"

"Oh, ay, true; I met him at the Opera one night, and he took the opportunity of thanking me for preventing his blowing out my brother-in-law's brains. So as he seemed to be fond

of powder and shot, I thought it a pity so much valour should be wasted, and invited him down into Lincolnshire to shoot wood-cocks or wild-ducks, since the law would not countenance his practising his skill on Wildey."

"I have already heard three different versions of that story," replied Cameron, gravely, "they were all unlike each other, perhaps you can tell me the truth."

"Upon my word, I know very little about it. The fools quarrelled over their bottle, and proved themselves to have more words than wit: Wildey was anxious to get out of it, and told your wife; she like a true woman, must interfere, and coaxed me into informing against them, I really could not resist her winning ways, and took more trouble in the matter than either of the belligerent's heads was worth. You were out of the way at the time, or it would have fallen to your share instead; so you really ought to be much obliged to me."

"Is that all you know of the matter?" inquired Mr. Cameron, half suspiciously.

"No, indeed," replied Arnold, bluntly, "you asked me the cause of the quarrel, and I could not tell; if you inquire the consequences—that is another story altogether."

"And what were they?" demanded Mr. Cameron, looking down at his pocket-handkerchief.

"They were very complicated, and rather difficult to explain accurately. I think," pulling out his watch as he spoke, "I must really be going!"

"No, no," exclaimed the merchant, eagerly, "I fancy you know more than any one of these affairs, and you will not speak, let me beg—let me entreat you to be explicit."

"On what subject, my dear Sir. To what do you allude?"

"To my wife," answered Mr. Cameron in much agitation, "it is possible that I have been unjust, harsh, cruel, and by my precipitation I may have wrought my own misery. Tell me, I implore, if you know."

"My dear Sir, I cannot intermeddle between a husband and wife, Mrs. Cameron is now at

Littlemere, the way is before you, you are welcome to the house."

The husband was silent; Arnold found he had not said quite enough. He sat down again, and began very calmly to detail the circumstances of the several interviews he had had with May. Of course, this included a great deal of which her husband had entertained no suspicions. As Arnold related their various conversations, he listened with eager attention. May's confessions of misconduct, and declarations of penitence touched him much, and he looked a good deal astonished as his companion repeated the expressions of censure which he had so freely employed.

"She bore it very well," continued Arnold, "you know she is generous and frank, and my old friendship for her uncle interested me in her favour. Besides, I saw she was more to be pitied than blamed—foolish, careless, petulant she had been—"

"You are very unjust to her, Sir," exclaimed her husband, impatiently, "I do not wish to hear her blamed."

"Well, well, that is natural enough," replied Arnold, gravely keeping his countenance. "Wildey had misled her, or rather, he had in some instances compelled her to act against her own wishes, as much as he misrepresented her conduct to you. You know how often he insinuated things to her disadvantage."

"I have often suspected him of treachery," interposed the merchant.

"Well, he has owned his injustice now; he has acknowledged that he feared her influence with you, and misrepresented her. Take the trouble to read that letter with which he charged me."

Mr. Cameron opened the paper with trembling haste, he spread it on the table before him, and leaning his head on his hands so as to conceal his face, he silently perused it. Mr. Arnold rose, and walking to the fire-place, began intently to examine a painting which hung over the chimney-piece. A long pause ensued.

It was at length broken by Mr. Cameron, who rising went to Arnold, and wringing his

hand, said in a low voice, "I am very much obliged to you."

"I am glad to be of use," was Arnold's answer.

Mr. Cameron seemed preparing to leave the room.

"Where are you going?" inquired his companion.

"To tell that scoundrel what I think of his treachery," exclaimed the merchant, much agitated, "to dismiss him from my service, to—"

He could not go on from excitement.

"No, my dear Sir," interposed Arnold, "not in your present temper, not with your agitated feelings. Do not seek the presence of the man who has injured you whilst the sense of that injury is so keen. He can no longer hurt you, you can afford therefore to take time for thought before action."

"It is because he has injured May, that I would punish him. Injury to myself I could bear, but to hurt her feelings and her character! It is beyond forgiveness—almost—"

"It should not pass with impunity, I admit," replied Arnold, laying his hand on Mr. Cameron's arm, "I only say wait till you have taken time to consider your determination. Do nothing rashly."

The merchant sat down again, and remained for some minutes motionless, in deep thought: at length he spoke again.

"You are right, Arnold. I will not see him now. But my wife—where is she?"

"She is at Littlemere."

"And will she forgive me?"

"Judge her by yourself."

"Ah—if I was so angry with Wildey, and feel so reluctant to pardon him, may not she be the same towards me?"

"I did not mean that. I would say, that as she has offended you, and justly too, so there is a need of mutual forgiveness, and mutual concession."

"I do not remember that she ever offended me; or if she did, it was my fault, or my fancy; no, Mr. Arnold, the forgiveness must be all on her side."

"As you please! suppose we go down to Littlemere together, to try what effect an interview will have."

To this the merchant readily consented, he was impatient to be off, and to use his influence with his wife to procure a pardon for the past. Arnold being well up in the time of trains on the Great Northern line by this time, was able to give him necessary information, and their hasty preparations being soon made they were ready to start by such a train as would ensure their reaching Littlemere that evening.

A few lines to Grace, to tell her of the success of his mission, and their journey to the country, were all he considered necessary.

He judged it safer for James Wildey's constitution to remain in ignorance. His new found virtue would be better fostered, under the shade of uncertainty and curiosity; the former especially, so far as related to possible interviews with either Mr. Cameron or Arnold, would be most efficacious to promote the stability of his good resolutions, just as coloured

glass by obscuring the light, has the property of inducing young plants to send out stronger and larger roots.

Leaving them on their journey, let us see what was doing at Littlemere, and how May was received there.

The sudden apppearance of the young wife, in her old home, no notice given, and no reason assigned for the journey, excited no small surprise in the minds of its inmates. Mr. Luttrell, indeed, who returned to the house within five minutes of her entrance, felt and expressed the most unqualified delight. He had, after the first moment of seeing her carriage at the door, been too happy in her presence, to allow room in his mind even for the sensation of wonder as to her reason for coming; he was troubled with no doubts of the past, no misgivings for the future. She was his own darling niece, come to his own house; and he naturally felt that no one had a better right to come there, no one was more welcome, and as he innocently supposed, no one was more likely to be happy. She had always seemed to be merry and contented, and it no more occurred to his mind

now, that her tastes could be changed, or her temper altered, than it did to imagine any sinister or unpleasant reason for her quitting her own home to seek his.

But Mrs. Arnold's feelings were different; she had sundry painful apprehensions and doubts in her mind, which prevented her meeting her cousin with the unqualified welcome the latter might have wished for.

Indeed, on first turning round in the conservatory, and discovering the young lady standing in the drawing-room, she had been startled almost into believing it a supernatural appearance. She had been deeply engaged that very morning, in studying some papers on mesmerism, which had been sent down for her husband's perusal; and to her limited faculties, and timid apprehension, the whole thing seemed so nearly connected with magic and mischief, that she had risen from the books, with her mind in a nervous and excitable state, peculiarly liable to be affected by any sudden alarm.

Mrs. Cameron's smile and voice had reassured her, and dispersed all fears of a superstitious nature; but the discovery imme-

diately ensuing that not only was her cousin come down to pay her uncle a visit, indefinite as to time, but that she had brought her waiting-woman with her, created fears of a less romantic, but quite as troublesome a kind.

In the first place, their dinner to-day, ordered only for herself and Mr. Luttrell, was perhaps rather scanty for a third person; and she never could bear to alter her arrangements, when once the bill of fare had been made out. Then there was the conviction which forced itself on her mind, that rooms must be prepared for these two new comers, and although she might hope to accommodate May pretty well, unless she were grown much more fastidious since her marriage, still there was the maid—a most formidable character in her eyes, with whom she should be afraid to have anything to do, and to whom she felt she could hardly even venture to speak.

But worst of all, there was the will of her absent husband, still unknown to her; like a good wife, she properly looked on this as the most important point to be considered. Suppose he should disapprove of May's visit—what

was to be done? would she go away in consequence; or if not, would not she, Mrs. Arnold be to blame?

He never did like changes made in the house, without consulting him, but how could she help it now? she could not prevent May's remaining, or insist on her finding other lodgings, until Mr. Arnold's pleasure on the subject was known; she was quite in despair at the thought, and she walked in and out of the room with a forlorn and desperate sort of air; at one time helping to deposit Mrs. Cameron's packages in her room, that she might have a good survey of her terrible maid; at another looking anxiously out of the hall-door, with a sort of vague idea that Mr. Arnold would be making his appearance, to relieve her from her perplexities; and then seeking her cousin, to urge on her offers of refreshment, or observations on her bonnet, equally unconnected and unnecessary.

Meanwhile, Mr. Luttrell had been calling upon May for her approval of all the changes already effected, and her opinion of what he told her, were still in progress, oddly mixed up with information as to the last new scientific

work, he had read, and the opinion of the press as to the latest opera. No one asked her why she came, no one remembered to inquire for her husband; or made any investigations on the subject of their separation.

At length, however, Mrs. Arnold's mind was relieved from her fears, by the announcement that May volunteered to her, to the effect, that she had seen Mr. Arnold in London, that he had accompanied her to the railroad; and had desired her to say, that he hoped himself to be down at Littlemere before very long.

The effect of this communication was evident, Mrs. Arnold's countenance cleared up, she gave a deep sigh, indicative of the removal of a great weight from her mind, and turning to her cousin with an air of genuine satisfaction, she at once expressed her pleasure at her visit, her hope it would be of long continuance, and her earnest wish that she might find herself comfortable, and at home.

After a little consideration, she added an observation to the effect, that they had changed places since they were last together here, for now she

was mistress of the establishment; but she hoped May, though visitor, would do as she pleased, and consider herself quite welcome.

It was not said in a way to offend, being evidently intended to express good-will; and May replied cheerfully, that she had no doubt her uncle felt the advantage of the change, as he now had an experienced and skilful housekeeper, instead of a careless, giddy, ignorant girl, as she had always shewn herself.

Her uncle put in a demurrer, he was quite aware of all the advantages of the present *régime;* there were great improvements in many respects, he admitted; but he would not allow that there had been any deficiencies formerly; to be sure, the getting rid of Nanny was a very great step towards domestic peace, which he could not have effected himself; but then if she had staid, they were so used to her, that he at least could have borne it perfectly.

May was in a state of wild excitement, she chatted and laughed, and remarked on the changes occurring there; inquired after every

individual neighbour for five miles round; especially their two bride's-maids, and their new gowns; described the Queen's dress at the drawing-room, to Mrs. Arnold, and the Opera to her uncle; talked in short, of anything or everything unconnected with her own thoughts and feelings, and safe from exciting troublesome inquiries, or dangerous investigations.

Thus the afternoon passed away, in flutter and agitation on her part; and wonder and admiration on that of her auditors. She roamed over the neighbourhood, noticing every change in the country, and wondering at the immutability of the people, who had not altered in appearance since she left them six months before, forgetting that the time so fraught with events to herself, had passed over the heads of those she left in Lincolnshire, bringing nothing newer than the revolutions of the seasons, and the variations of the weather.

The next day being Sunday, there was, as May calculated, no chance of having a letter from town until Tuesday; and in the meantime, until this should arrive, and give her in-

telligence of the movements
success of her friends there,
to pass the time as best she
little, and talking as much a

Foolish May; these two
tion, consideration, and a sol
her duty for the future, woul
indeed; but she did not t
account. She would not th
reflect anymore; it was un
factory, dispiriting to do so.
her husband's determinatio
conduct. If he came to a s
returned to her, he would
taking any trouble; and i
would then be time enoug
about the means to soften h
to which she should apply.

At present, Mr. Arnold
the best he could for he
could then take her affairs
In the meantime, she woul
well as her limited opport
banish repentance and regre

Still there was a feeling in her heart that she was not doing quite right, something which suggested sober considerations; a sort of half-consciousness that she was not following Mr. Arnold's advice, and that Grace Dunsford in her situation would have acted differently. But then, she argued with herself, if she seemed grave and out of spirits, it would make her uncle uneasy, and Mrs. Arnold would ask awkward questions. It was due to her husband, as well as herself, to hide their disagreement until the result was known; and as she doubted not that the result would be a reconciliation, it would be absurd in her to make a two days quarrel, the subject of general observation and discussion.

The feeling, however, that she was wrong, made her extremely anxious to find some employment for her leisure; she resolved to do something very virtuous, as a compromise with her conscience. She would not humble herself, but she would do a monstrous deal of good to others; so she went in the morning, to the new Sunday school, and devoted herself to teaching the first class for a couple of hours;

enforcing on them the peculiar necessity of neatness and plainness of attire, and the unbecomingness of a love of finery, whilst all the time the eyes of her pupils being earnestly fixed on her, she flattered herself she was making a great impression on them by her moral lecture; little guessing that the flowers and feathers in her pretty little bonnet, were the universal subject of speculation amongst the girls; and that though they might hesitate as to the object of her instructions, they never forgot how many flounces she had on her muslin gown.

Then she went to church twice, and each time in coming out, spoke with exemplary condescension and good-nature, to the old women and little children whom she had formerly known; shook hands cordially with all the Cokers, and invited the two young ladies to come and drink tea at Littlemere on Monday afternoon; an invitation which threw them into ecstasies of satisfaction, and admiration of her kindness.

No fashionable physician attending his capricious patients, could be more labouriously con-

ciliating, no cabinet minister's lady, at her seat in the country, more unboundedly courteous and condescending.

Sunday evening was heavy and dull, for it was wet and they could not walk out, Mr. Luttrell dozed on the sofa, Mrs. Arnold read sermons to herself, and May sauntered about in the conservatory, examining the geraniums just coming into bloom, picking off dead leaves, or arranging patterns on the floor with the petals that had dropped from the flowers.

But dull evenings come to an end at last, although at such times it is very hard work *not* think, when there is anything disagreeable to obtrude on the mind. Supper, which an early dinner on Sunday made very desirable, served to finish off the weary hours, and then May was able to take refuge in bed, consoling herself that there would be more variety and amusement on the morrow.

The morrow did bring more variety certainly than she had calculated on. There were not only letters for her, but Mrs. Arnold had one from her London correspondent who happening to

have gone out of town on Saturday, had employed herself in the most obliging way in the world, in communicating passing events, to her dear friend in Lincolnshire.

It was made known to May in rather a singular way. She was sitting in the drawing-room, looking over the notes and letters Mr. Arnold had forwarded to her, when her cousin approached her with a solemn air, and said,

"May, I want to speak to you!"

"Well," said May, turning towards her, and suspending her reading.

"Will you come aside with me for the purpose. It is something very important!" continued Mrs. Arnold.

"Come aside!" ejaculated May, "why there is nobody in the room, so you can speak here can you not?"

"We may be interrupted," observed the other solemnly.

"My uncle is gone out, and so we have the house to ourselves," suggested May.

"But the servants may come in, whilst I am speaking," expostulated Mrs. Arnold.

"Then you can stop till they go out again;

so now, pray begin, has the cook burned the tea-cakes, or do you want my maid to cut you out a dress, or are you short of sugar and tea?"

"No, I have received most important intelligence from London, through my friend Mrs. Fane, and it regards my brother."

May started and coloured, half-afraid to hear what might come next. Anything about Wildey made her uneasy now. Her cousin looked suspiciously at her.

"Do you know anything about it, May?"

"About what—you have not told me what it is yet," replied May.

"Of course, it is a very unpleasant subject to talk about," continued Mrs. Arnold, "I am sure I should be the last person to wish to speak of the faults of my friends and relations; but then one must consider propriety and morality a little, and I should not like to compromise my character, especially on account of what my husband will think. So I trust you will give me a satisfactory explanation if possible, and if not, I must do the best I can. One cannot take too much care of one's own character!"

"Well," ejaculated May
composed and quiet as she
"Well or ill, Mrs. Ca
things about my brother ar
not to be said, and shoul
peated."

"Then I should recomm
from repeating them if you

"I only want to know th
says she is afraid there i
blame, and that sorry as sh
scandalous reports, she yet
justice to herself and me, t
say, that I may contrad
James' sake and yours."

"It is very liberal of M
whom I never heard bet
scornfully, "to take so m
stories about me, if that i
doing, for the sake of givi
of clearing them up; but
clined to take that trouble.

"Consider your charact

"I am not going to giv
of injuring it, by contradic

slanders unnoticed will die a natural death; contradicted they would grow and circulate faster than ever. Who is this Mrs. Fane, that her stories should give me a moment's concern ?"

"But unless you can give me some explanation of why you are here, Mrs. Cameron, I shall not feel justified in remaining with you; for Mrs. Fane said you left your husband's house it is supposed in order to accompany a certain honourable captain whose name she will not tell me, whilst your husband was away, and this is very shocking!"

"Very shocking indeed," retorted May, half angry, half amused, "but as you know very well that I came down here, attended by my own servants, you can easily ascertain if there is any truth in the story."

"But Mrs. Fane says, James pursued you, dragged away your companion, fought with him, was only prevented from killing him on the spot, by the interference of the police, who seized them both, carried them both to the magistrate, who ordered them both to be

bound fast, and then sent them home, where I suppose they unbound themselves directly—at least, I know I should."

May absolutely burst out laughing; Mrs. Arnold looked proportionably shocked.

"My dear Ann," cried May, when she could speak, "what extraordinary nonsense this good friend of yours has contrived to invent! Now the real truth is, that in some foolish after-dinner dispute, your brother did quarrel with an acquaintance of mine, and they were taken before a magistrate, and bound over to keep the peace, through the intervention of your own husband, who happened to hear of it. In fact, James told me he was going to fight," added May, after a moment's thought, "and I, thinking it wrong, got your husband to put a stop to it. That was my share in it. Mr. Cameron wished me to come down here, whilst he was out of town, and so at his command I came."

"And you are sure you did not elope?" inquired Mrs. Arnold, doubtfully.

"Call it an elopement if you like. I went off with my maid and footman, at the wish of

my husband, and accompanied to the railroad by *yours;* but you or Mrs. Fane are quite welcome to call it an elopement, if you like."

"I do not like at all; I think eloping very improper."

"Very sensible of you, indeed, my dear Ann. I hope you will never practise it."

"Good heavens, no; I should never think of such a thing. Well, I am glad you did not want to elope."

It may be presumed that Mrs. Arnold was satisfied with this explanation, as she broke a silence of some duration by observations on her domestic economy, and her intentions for tea that evening; and May was soon afterwards left to the enjoyment of her own correspondence and her own thoughts, whilst her cousin sought her usual occupations, and divided her attention between the kitchen and the conservatory.

Amongst the papers sent down to her, which consisted chiefly of notes of invitation, &c., the only one of any importance was the letter already mentioned as written by Wildey, under the impression that she was still in London. She read it with the liveliest feelings

affixing a still deeper stain on her character. Separation from her husband would of course give a colour to the most injurious stories, and she could never hope again to be received into society, if the history of their recent misunderstanding once became public.

What was to be done, was the question which in bitterness of heart she asked herself again and again, but which she could not decisively answer. Should she seek the interposition of her cousin, James?

Never! rather suffer anything than that—rather would she continue buried in the country, and let her character die a moral death, than seek her restoration to the world through his influence, and live a dependant on him.

Should she herself address her husband?

This required more consideration, before she could reply; and after a long lingering over the idea, she decided on nothing, except waiting for some communication with Mr. Arnold.

She passed the day in a state of dreamy uncertainty and indecision, wandering about with no fixed object, and paying so little atten-

"Yes, so happy!" reiterated the youngest sister.

"Happiness," observed Mrs. Arnold, with a sagacious air, "depends on content."

"But content depends on having all one wants, Ma'am," suggested Miss Coker.

"Everything one wishes," added Miss Lucy.

Mrs. Arnold's philosophy did not enable her to dispute this position.

"And what would make you happy, Miss Coker?" inquired May, who preferred a variation of the subject.

The young lady coloured very crimson, and hesitated a little, and then said:

"Plenty of money."

"A large fortune," said Lucy.

"A horse and carriage," said the first.

"A beautiful chariot and a pair of greys," cried the second.

"And a good house and garden," said the eldest.

"A large mansion, a beautiful park, and a house in London," was the addition of her sister's more enlarged imagination.

"And a handsome husband, no doubt," suggested Mr. Luttrell, slily.

"Oh, no, we never wish for such things," observed Miss Coker, gravely, and looking properly shocked at the idea.

"Never, certainly," added Lucy, emphatically.

"So very improper!" exclaimed Maria.

"Quite shocking!" cried Lucy.

"I did not know it was," replied Mr. Luttrell, meekly. "I thought all young ladies wished to be married."

"Miss Coker is right," replied Mrs. Arnold, gravely, "young ladies should never talk of such things."

Tea was over, and the dusk of evening was creeping on; the party drew round one of the windows to watch the sunset colours in the clouds, and they continued to chat in the same idle way. Something led them to ask about May's visit to the Isle of Wight; and she described to them with much animation their stormy voyage across from Cowes to Portsmouth; Captain Mountsteven's name was introduced, of course, and the girls would have a

description of him; his nan
alike delighted them, and
to confess that he was v
amusing, they insisted on
hero, and Miss Lucy sudden
little by bluntly inquiring,

"Pray, Mrs. Cameron,
band jealous of this ha
dier?"

As she could not con
"No," and it was not pe
her feelings to reply
May resorted to the usua
extremities, repeating in
prise:

"Jealous! why should y

"Oh, because he ought
would have been so charm
apprehension, injustice, pe
and ill-usage, and then a d
all wrong, and ample apo
concessions on his part, a
and magnanimous forgiven
with an entire reconciliatio
toration of confidence.
been charming!"

"Miss Lucy, I am surprised at you!" exclaimed Mrs. Arnold. "A jealous husband is shocking."

"Charming, I am sure," retorted the girl; "jealousy is a proof of love. I would be loved to distraction, and have my husband as jealous as, as—oh, as anything. I should delight in it. It would be so sweet to have quarrels and reconciliations!"

"And does not Mrs. Cameron agree with you?" said a voice behind, which produced a great sensation in the room. The two Miss Cokers screamed "Bless us!" Mrs. Arnold, who knew her husband's voice, and thought only of him, calmly turned towards him, to give him the welcome which suited his feelings. But May, who naturally associated him with her own affairs, and concluded that he would not have arrived so suddenly had he not something to communicate of importance, started from the low chair on which she was seated with so much impulse that she threw over a slender table behind her, on which stood Mrs. Arnold's work-basket, and thus created a very considerable addition to the confusion,

and gave a new direction to her cousin's thoughts.

The young visitors, abashed at the sudden entrance of a gentleman of whom they stood so much in awe as Mr. Arnold, stooped down instantly, to hide the embarrassment which no one would have perceived in the dark, in a diligent search for reels of cotton, stray buttons, and halfpence, rolling about *ad libitum*. Mrs. Arnold was groping for a lucifer-match, to light a candle on the chimney-piece; and Mr. Luttrell, quite forgetting that his friend had been absent, only wondered that his entrance should create so much emotion.

May, therefore, was the only one of the group who advanced to meet the intruder, or even bestowed any attention upon him. But she did; and she was about to ask some hurried question, when she caught the outline of another figure behind him; one which, even in the dusk, her quick eye recognised as that of her husband, and she stopped short, both in her advance and her speech. A hundred confused feelings were in her heart, but Arnold allowed no time for thought; he gently

pushed rather than led her to Mr. Cameron, and she was clasped in his arms, almost ere she knew where she was.

When Mrs. Arnold's diligent search was rewarded with success, and she was able to throw a light upon the scene before them, the others discovered that May had left the room, but none of them were in the least aware that she had gone off with her husband. Such a proof of inattention to Mr. Arnold was more than his dutiful wife could bear with equanimity; the two Miss Cokers had recovered sufficient presence of mind to rise and curtsey to him, and even Mr. Luttrell presently remembered that it was some days since he had seen him, and asked him where he had been; but Mrs. Cameron had gone without ceremony, and her cousin felt that some apology was due.

"I seem to have interrupted a merry party, young ladies," observed Mr. Arnold, benignly; "do not let me put a stop to the festivities of the evening; pray let us all sit down again!"

"Where is May?" inquired her uncle.

"Gone out of the room, very odd indeed," murmured the lady; "left her visitors, and never stayed to speak to you, Mr. Arnold; did you know she was here?"

He admitted it.

"Really, I must call her back," added Mrs. Arnold, rising.

"No," said her husband.

She sat down.

"Pray go on, Miss Lucy Coker," continued he; "you were describing your future husband, and your conjugal happiness, with a vivacity perfectly captivating!"

She made no reply.

"Have you no more to say?"

"No, Sir," replied Lucy, who scarcely dared speak to him.

"Alas, what have I lost by speaking thus prematurely! pray, Miss Coker, tell us a ghost-story. Now's the day and now's the hour to give it the fullest effect!"

Miss Coker, with a faltering voice, replied that she knew none.

Mr. Arnold professed profound grief, but added:

"If you will not give us a tale, I hope Mrs. Arnold will indulge us with some dinner, at least!"

"Dinner, my dear Mr. Arnold, why, we have just done tea!" remonstrated the wife.

"Well, then call it supper, if dinner it is not to be; only let it be a substantial meal, of good materials, for I am hungry, and so, no doubt, is my friend and companion."

"Your companion," replied his wife, astonished, "who do you mean — you have none?"

She paused as she was leaving the room, to gaze all round it, as if she expected to discover the companion spoken of concealed behind a sofa, or lurking in a dark corner.

"Now, Ann, hasten away to make your domestic and culinary arrangements, there's a good woman," said her husband. "You find supper for two, and I will promise to produce the two mouths to partake of it."

In spite of her excessive curiosity, she hastened away to obey him, casting wondering looks about the hall and passage, with a half-

expectation of meeting with some elucidation of the mystery; but she met with none. Nor was it till after her return to the drawing-room that it was cleared up by the entrance of Mr. and Mrs. Cameron, both looking very happy, and a little excited. The very cordial shake of the hands which her cousin then bestowed on Mr. Arnold, and the pleasure she expressed at seeing him, served as balm to Mrs. Arnold's wounded feelings of conjugal pride; and convincing her that no slight was intended to her husband, enabled her to receive her new visitor with satisfaction and hospitality.

CHAPTER VII.

POSTHUMUS. Kneel not to me!
The power I have on you, is to spare you,
The malice towards you, to forgive you. Live
And deal with others better.

CYMBELINE.

"I HOPE you like my alterations and improvements Mrs. Cameron," observed Mr. Arnold as he joined May on the lawn, one morning after breakfast. It was the second day after the reunion.

"Very much indeed," replied she, "I admire your skill in effecting both physical and moral changes. I shall always look on you as a clever man."

expect that will always be the result. You will be ruined next time."

"Yes, if the next time ever comes; and indeed Mr. Arnold, if the lesson I have had does not preserve me from treading back in the same steps, I shall deserve to be ruined!" replied she, very gravely and earnestly.

"Very pretty talking; but I see very well what it is—it is only talk—why you could not be down here two days without having company; you asked all the neighbourhood to tea, and would have done the same, had they numbered two dozen instead of two!"

She made no answer.

Presently he added,

"What are you and your husband going to do now?"

"I don't think I shall tell you, you are so cross this morning!"

He stopped, and looked her in the face.

"What a spoilt child it is," said he sarcastically; "when it's unhappy, it's so humble and penitent; but the moment it gets what it wants, then it will not bear a word of truth, but must

have everything sweet and
suit its taste!"

"You are unjust."

"If I had told you, y
woman, and had acted in
prudent, rational way in t
consequently your friends
uneasiness as to your future
were left to your own guidan
exposed to the temptation
beauty, and fashionable soci
have been delighted."

"Yes, indeed, I should,
well enough to be aware th
and that therefore praise
worth having. Had *you*
woman, I should have beg
so in truth."

"But because I only hint
a relapse, you fly into a p
speak to me."

"A very mild sort of pas
May, laughing, "but I am
tute of a protector, not s

guide, philosopher and friend as you choose to assert. I have my husband."

"Your husband utterly spoils you; I see that he would not contradict your slightest caprice, not for a thousand pounds!"

"What an unhappy woman I must be then, according to your own showing, possessed of wealth, youth, beauty, (I am quoting your own words, remember,) and a husband so unboundedly indulgent!"

"There is many a true word spoke in jest, Mrs. Cameron;" replied her companion, seriously, "and unless you learn to take correct and steady views of life and its responsibilities, you may find these same possessions, from earth's best blessings, turned into its very bitterest curse!"

"Oh, Mr. Arnold, never!"

"Why then have you, with these blessings, as you esteem them, so narrowly escaped a total wreck; what brought your happiness, your home, your honour into jeopardy—and why only three days ago, did you consider yourself as utterly wretched?"

She was silent.

"Why too, was there such a contrast between the feelings of your friend Grace Dunsford, and your own? why was she happy, absolutely happy, surrounded with difficulties, privations, and the darkest doubts for the future; whilst you were weary, fretful, discontented, in the midst of worldly sunshine?"

"It was the difference of our circumstances; that constitutes our trials. She lost her worldly prosperity, but she still had all her domestic happiness; take that from her, give her family disunion, and mistrust, and injustice, and see how she would bear that!"

"For shame, Mrs. Cameron, it was the difference of your dispositions made the contrast. She was struggling with no fanciful evils, no imaginary wants; it was with the real tangible difficulties of life; the lowering, heart-engrossing cares attending pecuniary want. You cannot tell, unless you have tried, how hard it is to endure these daily difficulties, with a calm, cheerful, trusting spirit; you know the old proverb, that when poverty comes in at the door, love will fly out of the window; and this is true of worldly love—too true. It is only

where the heart is set on higher things, and these difficulties can be met in a Christian spirit, that affection and domestic peace, survive domestic poverty. The struggle for daily bread, the anxiety for to-morrow's wants, the painful toil, which after all fails to procure the little luxuries so needful to the beloved invalid—these are the things which destroy the romance of life, and require a stronger support than natural good temper, if cheerful equanimity, and mutual forbearance are to be preserved. What do you know of this, Mrs. Cameron?"

She did not answer.

"Nothing;" he continued, as she was silent, "but again I ask, in what consisted the difference? It is in this, that you look on the present as the whole of life—enjoyment, its aim, and of its end—you never think! She considers it as a passage to the future, improvement is her aim—and the end—perfection, not here, but here after. Now I have preached you an unpleasant sermon; you see how disagreeable and cross I am; you can go away, and avoid a conversation with me in future, except before witnesses."

"No," said May, looking at him with tears

in her eyes, and putting her hand through his arm as she spoke, "I will not leave you, I am not angry, nor do I think you disagreeable, I am not such an idiot as that. You shall tell me more; you shall explain to me how I can learn to feel, and think, and act, as Grace does; and so prevent my worldly prosperity bringing on me heavier misfortunes."

"That would not be the work of an hour, or a day, or a week of preaching. I am better at finding faults than mending them I believe. I can see the contrast between you and your friend, but I cannot undertake to make you alike. Your own good sense, reflection, and consideration, and those sort of things must be your guides. You will not get wiser or better by going to operas, or dancing at balls, or flirting with handsome young men. You are married; marriage has its own duties—as you may see if you read over the marriage-service—you have wealth, and money too has its responsibilities—you are answerable for the use you make of it, and also for the use you induce your husband to make of it. You know well enough, whether it is entrusted to you, to entertain the

rich at extravagant parties, or to spend in hanging diamonds and pearls round your neck and arms. I need not direct you in such matters. You have friends to whom you can show affection—and enemies whom you may forgive! In short, your life has been given for the same purpose as that of every other creature—and like others, it is in your power to seek out, and accomplish that purpose, or to neglect it utterly!"

"It is a serious thought."

"Sunshine does not last for ever, but night and winter are wretched and gloomy to those only, who have made no provision or defence against them. Sorrow and care are no doubt as necessary to our mental health, as darkness and repose are to our bodily well-being. And we shall see this some day: we shall learn it, whether we profit by it or not. Here comes your husband; he is afraid I shall carry off his treasure."

"Ah, he need not be alarmed; your estimation, and his, of his wife's worth are very different," replied May smiling, "were you inclined

to such robbery, Mr. Dunsford would be the one to fear."

"There go along to him, and tell him how I have been scolding you; and I shall go and mind my own business, as you have probably been wishing for this half hour that I would do!"

She went to her husband accordingly, and found him looking very grave and thoughtful, and with natural curiosity she inquired what occupied his thoughts.

He told her he was debating a point in which she was concerned; and as he could not decide for himself, he would refer it to her. "What should he do with regard to Wildey?"

"Oh, forgive him," cried May, directly: "forgive him, of course, but never believe him again; I bear him no malice, but I suppose one need not trust him."

"And continue him in the counting-house?"

"Why, yes, I suppose so," said May. "It would be an odd sort of forgiveness to turn him out, and have nothing more to do with him: but after all you are the best judge, and I do not want to interfere, lest I should give you

wrong advice. Ask Mr. Arnold, if you cannot decide for yourself. He can tell everything! He understands him very well."

"I rather think Arnold is partial to Wildey," observed Mr. Cameron.

"Very likely, he has a sort of kindness for good-for-nothing people; that's the reason he is so fond of me," said the young wife.

"My love!" remonstrated the husband, quite shocked at such an idea.

"Oh, you must not fancy everybody is as great an admirer of mine as you are; it's a foolish habit to suppose everyone inevitably in love with me, because you like me yourself. I do not wish you to see my faults if you can help it; but I cannot expect all the world to be so conveniently blind; and have therefore made up my mind to the fact that a speck here and there will appear to other people, and that there are even some who consider me not quite perfect. Whether it arises from defects in their vision, or liveliness of imagination, posterity must decide. Of this number, Mr. Arnold is one. He considers me a very inferior sort of

person, and he likes me all the same; therefore, I say, he has a natural love for faulty people."

"Well, well, but now about Wildey; I do not want to dismiss him, if you think I can keep him on: there is so much trusted to him, it would include so much trouble and anxiety to change, I hardly think I should be equal to it. And as you say, we had much better forgive him."

"I wish you would give up that tiresome business altogether: there would be no doubt then about what you would do with Wildey. I am sure it is too much for you to attend to it; you cannot do your duty properly to two such troublesome, engrossing, and full-of-hazard sort of things, as your counting-house and your wife; and it is better to renounce one, than to neglect both."

Mr. Cameron smiled.

"And I do not want to be the party renounced at all!" exclaimed May.

"I deserve the reproach, May," replied he, "but you need not fear for the future."

"Indeed, I did not mean a reproach," cried

she eagerly, "I was merely speaking in jest, and I would not, indeed I would not for anything say what could cause you pain, or seem like a reproach. I was not thinking of the past, it was because I was not, that I said it, you know we settled to forget all that was disagreeable, and I had really done so. Indeed, such an arrangement is too much to my advantage for me to wish to infringe it. But you *will* give up your business I know, and close the concern."

"My dear May, it would be very much pleasanter in some respects, but I hardly like to agree to it, because it would throw so many people out of employ; and besides it is so idle and luxurious, to lead a life of mere pleasure, and amusement; I hardly know whether it would be even happy."

"We need not be idle or luxurious, because you were no longer a merchant; we might find occupation enough in doing good to others, and being of use; we might have a house in the country, and tenants, and property to look after, and schools, and societies, and all the good things which rich people invent for the benefit

of their neighbours. What
wealth, if it is to prevent
would like best, or why sh
counting-house people in con

"I do not for a moment
that they are incompatible."

"If you were a young m
to earn," continued she, "li
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your age, and with your for
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good of your fellow-creature
to accumulate more; leave t
tion open to younger men
to profit in reality by wha
dustriously earned."

He looked at her with a
not answer.

"I suppose I am a bad
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but I can think and feel str
and I am sure that you, and

would be happier with such a scheme of life, than in returning each to our old way."

"I do not like to give up the whole concern; to renounce the business I have been all my life attending to. The counting-house and its affairs, are to me like a favourite child; to close them would be celebrating its funeral, after having myself destroyed them."

"The counting-house is not my child," replied May, laughing, "I suppose I am like all step-mothers in story-books, prompting you to abandon your own elder offspring; but if you cannot bear to think of its annihilation, what do you say to giving away your pet daughter; make Wildey a present of the concern; and let him carry it on in his own name; only withdraw in good earnest yourself, that in case he ruins himself, you may not be involved."

"How you talk, May—it is more than Wildey deserves!"

"Probably—but as I said before, consult Mr. Arnold about it; he is Wildey's brother-in-law you know, and perhaps would assist in setting him up in business; and I suppose that if it required any great sacrifice on your part—

of money I mean—you could have security—a bond—or a mortgage—or a trustee—or whatever you call those sort of things, that Wildey would repay you when he had made money enough."

"A bond, or a mortgage—or a trustee," repeated her husband, laughing, "I must give you a lesson in business-matters, I think, to teach you the difference between such things; or what will you do when I am dead, and you are obliged to look after your own property?"

"Don't, don't talk of such things Mr. Cameron," cried May; "it is horrid and disagreeable. Just say you will do as I wish, and begin making arrangements accordingly. And I promise you I will be the most entertaining of companions, the most careful of housekeepers, the most indefatigable of village patronesses, and the most indulgent of tyrants to you, from henceforth, in our country-home."

"I will do everything you wish on those terms."

"Oh, thank you! thank you! how happy we shall be; we will have such a charming country-house, such an enchanting garden;

such a pattern of a parish; nobody shall be poor, nobody shall be idle, nobody shall be bad, we will spare no pains to make them everything that is good, and misery and woe shall be mere myths amongst them. It will be charming."

"How you run on, my love!"

"I shall run off now instead, and look for Mr. Arnold to make him come and arrange the plan with you, for when once it is set going, I shall feel sure of it; until then I shall be afraid it may all end in imagination and idle talk."

It was not until after this conversation, that the post came in, but when it did, it brought May a letter from her cousin, which did not make her at all less inclined to forgive his injuries; on the contrary, it moved her strongly in his favour. Wildey wrote with all the art of which he was master, a letter so penitent, so humble, so self-accusing, and at the same time so soothing to May's feelings of self-love, as to produce almost all the effect he expected and wished. There was no open flattery, that she would have despised; but there was admiration insinuated in the most delicate way; allusions

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could understand, a small
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tremities, and made him, as
he was. Now he was con
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Cameron's goodness had
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to expect secresy from her
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was happy with her husband

that she would sometimes give a thought to one, whose peace had been wrecked by basking too long in the bright smiles, accorded, as he once believed from regard to himself; and who, rudely awakened from a dream of happiness too blissful for such a wretch as himself, had been driven frantic, by distant glimpses of that paradise, from which he found himself for ever excluded.

May's conscience on reading this recalled past scenes, and she recollected with shame how she had allowed herself to tamper with Wildey's affections, and to win only to reject them. This had been one of her early errors; and perhaps it was to this, she had owed her recent unhappiness. Wildey, possibly, was struggling with a hopeless and incurable affection! and the change in his manners, his presumption, his harshness, his overbearing way, had been merely assumed to conceal other feelings, which might not be expressed. She was half-flattered, half-angry, at the strain of the conclusion of his letter, and she hesitated what she should do; whether she should shew it to Mr. Cameron or not. Had she been a

little more angry, she would certainly have done so at once, but she feared to injure her cousin, and this consideration stopped her.

"James is so sorry," said she, looking up at her husband, as he sat reading his letters, "this is a letter from him."

"Oh," said Mr. Cameron.

"Ah," said Arnold, who was present, "so he ought to be; what does he say, May; pray let us hear his precious epistle; something very pathetic and tender to judge by your face."

"It is not to you Mr. Arnold, and I don't think it fair to let you see his confessions, made in confidence; Mr. Cameron may if he likes: though as he and I are one, perhaps my reading it is enough for us both!"

"I am sure I have letters enough of my own to read," said Mr. Cameron, despondingly surveying the heap before him, "so if Wildey's is not on business, I shall vote with you that one reading will do for both, as you can tell me about it some other time."

May lighted a taper, and very deliberately burnt the letter. Perhaps it was the best way; such effusions need not be read again.

She did not dwell much on it, but turned her thoughts to the fairy castles which hope and fancy were building of a happy country life; on these she meditated continually, and was perpetually painting pictures of the future in the brightest colours. Her husband seemed to enjoy them, but as yet, he had taken no step towards a change, except talking over the matter with Arnold; he wanted to be quiet for a little while, and enjoy a few days respite from business, in the pleasant society then at Littlemere. In fact, he was feeling far from well, although he did not complain, and nobody suspected he had reason to do so. Whether the agitation of the last ten days had anything to do with this indisposition, or whether he would have experienced the same symptoms, had nothing occurred to excite him, cannot now be told; the result alone remains to be related, and that was as unexpected as it was melancholy. He was seated on the sofa, conversing with his wife, one warm afternoon, when his articulation suddenly failed, his voice became indistinct, the words died on his lips, and he sank back insensible.

May's alarm of course was terrible, but not overpowering; she exerted both her mind and her body to assist him, summoned help, suggested remedies, and carried them into practice; but no exertion was of any avail. He partially recovered at first, regained the use of his senses, and in some degree the power of speech. But he felt, and expressed the conviction that he was dying. If anything could have revived him, it would have been the indefatigable tenderness and devotion of his wife: again and again he blessed and thanked her, as she waited on him, declaring in broken sentences that she had been, ever since their union, the source of his greatest happiness, and that he had nothing to regret of their married life, except having for a short time misunderstood and misjudged her. But May's self-reproaches told her sterner truths, than what his tenderness prompted. It is in such moments as these, that conscience speaks aloud; and hers reminded her of hundreds of little actions done or left undone, when duty required another course. How earnestly, how sincerely did she now wish for a little longer time to prove her estimate of her husband's

worth, her gratitude for his devoted affection! But it might not be. She had another and a harder lesson to learn of the realities of life; she had another example to convince her, that if we would be happy in the future, we must use the present well; that to pass our life in dreams of good, which always is to be, and never is accomplished, is not the way to lay up stores of peaceful memories to soothe us in our troubled moments.

It was over! and the scene of last November was reversed; it was the same roof that sheltered her, the same circle of friends that surrounded her, now that she was a widow, as when she had first been congratulated as a bride; but oh, how changed was May herself! The light-hearted, careless, thoughtless girl was merged in a character the very reverse. The days so sadly spent by her husband's sick bed, were not passed without fruit; and the close-fitting cap, and long black gown, did not present a greater contrast to her usual elegant and gay attire, than did the state of her mind after her bereavement, to what it was a month before. Her grief was as calm as it was sincere, but so

little demonstrative that few would have guessed how truly she sorrowed. Her indifference about the minute conventionalities of weeds, rather shocked Mrs. Arnold, who attributed to unconcern for her husband, the carelessness she manifested as to the depth of her crape. But Arnold judged her better; and he saw in her self-control, her quiet attention to necessary business, her patience in little difficulties, and her endurance of small provocations, as decisive a proof of her progress in self-discipline, as he subsequently gathered from the rational plan of future life which she gradually detailed to him.

Of the large circle who expressed, and the smaller group who really felt concern and regret at the death of the rich merchant, and anxiety for the welfare of his young widow, there was none who experienced stronger emotion than her cousin James Wildey. But the thoughts which disturbed his mind, and fermented in that busy heart were not all of a nature to be uttered aloud. It would not be easy to describe them, and it would be very far from pleasant; who would wish to see laid bare all the

secrets of a heart so black as his, throbbing with fear at crimes committed, and with agitation for deceit and treachery still in prospect. Yet Wildey, as he said himself, was not quite a demon; and there were still some softer feelings surviving in his heart.

When he gazed at the coffin containing the corpse of the man he had so deeply injured, and thought that the latest act of that stiffened hand had been to write a letter of forgiveness to himself, he must have been something harder than ever was in human form, to have been quite unmoved. The remembrance of his patron and friend was connected with nothing but kindness and consideration towards himself, repaid by the blackest treachery. Death had removed all fear of detection; and had therefore done away much of the secret hatred with which any individual views an injured benefactor. But if this fear were thus removed, there was another sentiment more torturing substituted, and this was remorse; his conscience, not quite hardened, now reproached him bitterly, as he thought that this was his return for the favours heaped upon him.

pect. It was not until the day after the funeral, when he was about to return to London, that he saw his cousin; then she sent for him, and with some genuine emotion, and a good deal of anxious acting, he appeared before her.

She was seated at her desk with papers before her; but she rose to meet him, and silently, with a grave, calm face, she held out her hand.

He took it, and put his lips to the delicate fingers, which visibly trembled in his grasp. She pointed to a chair near her seat; and they both sat down without speaking, May looking at her desk without seeing it, her mind full of anxious thoughts, and he earnestly contemplating her profile, and trying to read there her feelings and intentions. She broke the silence at last by turning towards him and observing, that she supposed Mr. Arnold had explained to him how things were to go on.

"No, Arnold had as yet said nothing to him, he believed they were to have an explanation before he went to town, but he had not seen him that morning."

In truth, Wildey was enduring no small de-

gree of suspense and anxiety at this moment, from the ignorance in which he had been kept. Of Mr. Cameron's will, he knew nothing. He believed it to be in London, in the hands of his solicitor, and he supposed that Arnold's intention of accompanying him to town, had something to do with this matter. Never for a moment doubting that he was largely concerned in the will of the deceased, he felt a burning curiosity to know and understand this mystery.

May rose on receiving his answer, and opening a door into an inner room, she asked Mr. Arnold, whom she knew to be sitting there, to favour her with his company for a moment. He came, with a pen in his hand, and a look of business on his brow. May told him he had better explain to Wildey all that they wished him to do, with regard to the business in London, and other matters; she should herself understand it better, if repeated in her presence.

Mr. Arnold put a paper into Wildey's hands, saying abruptly,

"There's the will; you would perhaps like to see that!"

With eager hands, the clerk received, and with troubled mind he read the important document; of course expecting to find his own name mentioned, until he saw the date; and then his heart misgave him.

It was regularly and formally drawn up, signed and witnessed, on the very day after Mr. Cameron's arrival at Littlemere. Small chance was there then of a favourable remembrance of himself at such a time.

His anticipations proved correct, every old clerk in the establishment, those he had dismissed, and those he had retained was remembered; to his first wife's only sister, a considerable legacy was left; to the Ashtons a still larger sum was bequeathed: besides the annuity to the father, there was no less a bequest than ten thousand pounds given to the children, one thousand a-piece to the younger ones, and the rest to his god-daughter Grace Dunsford, to be settled on her and her children; intended, so the testator said, as a testimony to the worth both of her and her husband. But of James Wildey himself no notice was taken; there was neither legacy, nor word of forgiveness.

Never till this moment
he would be amply provide
merchant, and the shock
terrible force; his lip qui
blanched, as he found
doubts realized, or rather
tressing certainty.

Mrs. Cameron was resi
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to her, and it might be
besides her jointure of fi
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He paused, and ponder
for some time, before he
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he said in a tone of resigna

"It is like himself, just
the disposal of such a prin
in the same liberal spirit in
Cousin, your wealth will
it, both to yourself and otl

May looked at him w

but she did not answer. However he, could read approbation in her glance, and that was what he wanted.

"There is but one thing I could have wished, deeply as I had displeased Mr. Cameron, it would have been indeed a comfort to me, if in such a document, he had inserted one word of pardon. Perhaps I was too bad to be forgiven!"

"No, no, indeed," cried May, warmly, "how can you say so; almost the last act of his life, was to write you a letter of full, perfect forgiveness—did you not receive it?"

"I did," replied Wildey, pressing his hand on his waistcoat, as if to intimate that the letter was carried there.

"Then what more could you expect?" said Arnold, bluntly. "He did not allude to you in his will," continued he, seeing that Wildey made no answer, "because he did not wish to make your scandalous conduct public. To have inserted forgiveness would have implied foregone injuries; and in abstaining from this, he left you a better legacy than you deserve, seeing he has left you your good name!"

"No one is a better judge of his generosity than you, James," added May, with a quivering lip, "except myself. Those who knew him best, owe most to him, and ought to bear his memory the highest reverence!"

"True," replied her cousin. Then after a pause, and turning to Arnold, he said, "and is the business to be carried on, or closed; you as trustee for my cousin, and executor, I suppose will decide?"

"Carried on for the next six months, at least;" replied Mr. Arnold. "For that period, if you will continue in your present post, Mrs. Cameron intends to trust it to you. But there are to be some alterations made in the counting-house."

These alterations he then proceeded to detail; they were principally changes amongst the clerks, some who had been recently promoted by Wildey, being dismissed; and others substituted of Arnold's own choice. The friend of his own, already mentioned, was to be second in the house, the whole of the affairs were to be subject to the control and approval of Arnold himself.

Wildey had his own schemes to carry out, and his own hopes for the future; otherwise, he would not have consented to continue in his present situation, under such a system of *surveillance* and restraint as was threatened. This was his first thought, his second was of a humbler nature; he was in Arnold's power, and any attempt at rebellion against him, would probably be followed by discoveries which might blast his character, and ruin his hopes for ever. No, there was nothing for it, but to submit.

Arnold presently left the room, to finish the preparation of the papers in which he was engaged, telling May he was at her service at any time she needed him. The young widow remained with her cousin at her side.

"May," said Wildey at length, "may I conclude from these arrangements, that you forgive, and trust me again?"

"I forgive you fully, James; you have deeply injured me, but I believe I too have to accuse myself for my conduct towards you, we have mutually to forgive!"

"Ah, May, do not blame yourself—believe me, I feel no resentment—could not towards

you. But since you conti
tion of such trust, I will sh
a double exertion in your
for you day and night."

"You will toil for yours
in your own favour!"

He started, flushed, and
cited, demanded her meani

"That the profits der
must be devoted to liquidat
incurred towards Mr. Arn
purpose I wish the concer
it given up at once, how c
him?"

"Good Heavens!" crie
pale as he had been red be
appointed at a conclusion w
would be so different, "di
that transaction?"

He dared say no more
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to his cousin, and he fea
which might implicate him

"He told me that he
sums to save your credi

were involved, and that he had no expectation of being repaid. I am determined that he shall, and by your own exertions. I might easily transfer the debt to myself, and leave you no longer in his power, but I think you would not be so happy in having it paid for you, as in working it out yourself. Am I wrong in this?"

Wildey thought it better to make a vehement asserveration of her correct judgment.

"Then," continued she, "work; work for my sake, and for your own; exert yourself in every way, and when you have cleared off this first obstacle in your path, James, I will endeavour to advance your own fortune. If, that is, you prove yourself worthy of my favour, by integrity and straightforward dealing. I give you an opportunity of regaining the good opinion you have forfeited; another opening in life. All henceforth depends on yourself."

She was a little astonished at the vehement effect her speech produced; James fell on his knees beside her, and kissing her hand again and again, vowed and declared in the most passionate terms, that she should never have

She did not hold out her hand again; and he was compelled to withdraw, according to her desire, without any further demonstrations of feeling or sentiment.

CHAPTER VIII.

PAULINA. I, an old turtle
Will wing me to some withered bough, and there,
My mate that's never to be found again,
Lament till I am lost.
Peace, Paulina,
Thou should'st a husband take by my consent!
WINTER'S TALE.

VERY great would have been Mrs. Cameron's surprise, had she conjectured the nature of the thoughts and hopes which her kindness to her cousin awakened in his mind. Very far was she from imagining for a moment, that he had the presumption to suppose it was personal favour to himself which prompted her conduct. Wildey so little understood a woman's nature, at least the nature of a woman of sense, modesty, propriety and feeling, as to entertain the most preposterous self-flatteries with regard to

her opinions and wishes. Without principles of honour, delicacy, or generosity himself, and with abundance of self-esteem, and sordid ambition, he actually left her impressed with the notion that their views for the future exactly corresponded.

Nothing appeared more natural, more easy, more straightforward than his present path; he must devote himself to business, he must endeavour to conciliate old friends, and to gain new ones; he must prove himself industrious, honourable, active; he must win Arnold's good opinion, and earn a right to May's; in short, he must work for a character for the next six months.

That was the time of probation fixed for him, and this was the end to be achieved. It was a great while to be forced to play the hypocrite; a weary time to employ in unremitting industry; a terrible interval to be devoted to courting those he detested; and pleasing those whom he would rather have seen annihilated. But it was worth the struggle; the prize he had in view was a great one, and he doubted not of obtaining it. This prize, which be believed himself so sure to win, this advantage

which was worth an arduous struggle, was nothing less than the hand of his wealthy and beautiful cousin, which he flattered himself she was prepared to hold out to him, so soon as common decency would permit it.

He actually entertained the idea, that she was planning and proposing this, ere she had worn her weeds three days, before the tears for her recent loss had dried in her eyes. It was to this motive he attributed what she said, and for this purpose he supposed she had limited him to six months for his trial.

It seemed indeed to him, as natural as it was desirable, to make such an arrangement; she had owed her elevation to him, her fortune was, in point of fact, his work; *she* had gained every thing, and *he* nothing. Now it was her turn to be generously grateful; to remember her former promise, and to make his fortune in the way which the recent turn of events placed in her power. As to her affection, he never doubted of that; probably, she had fallen in love with him, long ago; and now that she could afford to gratify her wishes, it would be the properest step in the world for her to take.

How, indeed, could she help loving him, with

such talents, such manners, such a person as he possessed; and his birth was as good as her own; there need be no impediment there.

Yes, it was every way suitable and proper, and he began to work upon the scheme immediately.

For this purpose, he applied laboriously to the most irksome details of business; for this purpose, he was paradingly minute in laying the account of profit and loss before Mr. Arnold; and proving with a proud humility, his perfect integrity, his skill, and his foresight.

For this end, too, he courted the Dunsfords, insisted on being friends with Harry, flattered Grace, and made a sort of jesting love to Julia, whom he used to call his little wife. He would walk out of an evening to Hampstead, where they settled immediately after Grace's confinement, and come to take tea with them in the most friendly way; he would talk to Grace about the late Mr. Cameron, with the romance of devoted affection; he would profess that he was the great object of his veneration; that the more he reflected on his character, the more he admired it; the greater his efforts to copy

his example, the more he discovered the difficulties of such emulation, and (truest of all) that nevertheless the highest object of his ambition, was to walk in his steps, and follow his example, wherever practicable.

Nothing could be more amiably domestic than his tastes and habits; he caressed the children, played at chess with Robert, tried to sing with Miss Hume, who was now living with them, and even proposed to stand godfather to the baby, which offer they were gratefully and thankfully able to decline, the number of sponsors being already complete without him.

He seldom mentioned May, and when he did, it was in a tone of respectful reserve, which might have befitted a foot-page speaking of an empress.

At first the Dunsfords met his advances slowly, and with considerable coolness; but they were neither resentful nor of suspicious natures, and his perseverance in friendly efforts without any apparent object to be gained, overcame their reluctance, and produced more cordiality. One circumstance especially tended to

place him on a footing of still greater intimacy. Poor old Mr. Ashton, with the caprice so usual in those suffering from such complaints as his, took suddenly a great fancy to Wildey. His presence seemed in some way connected with former days, and times of happy, honourable exertion; and he appeared to enjoy nothing so much as hearing Wildey talk, and occasionally asking questions of him as to business matters.

Grace's heart could not close itself to one who was kind and forbearing to her father; and she gradually became almost as fond of him, as Julia and Sarah already were. This was exactly what he intended, for Julia and Sarah were to pay a long visit to Mrs. Cameron, before the summer was quite over; and when Jane was able to enjoy a few weeks holiday, Grace was to go down too, and bring them back.

Wildey intended that they should carry with them a favourable report, and often pictured to himself the feelings with which he supposed May would listen to his praises, and the sentiments which their eulogiums would raise in her mind, during their visit to her new home.

It had been a considerable matter of discussion between Mrs. Cameron and Mr. Arnold, how they were to arrange about this new home. It seemed equally natural and right that she should have a house of her own, and that her uncle should enjoy her society. But it would not do; they both felt, that she should become once more mistress of Littlemere, if her cousin were to remain in the house; it would not answer to have the deposed sovereign so near the throne. Accordingly, Arnold professed his willingness to remove to some other quarters, and for a little time May considered this plan. But there were more objections than advantages here; Arnold evidently regarded with extreme regret the idea of quitting the scene of his improvements; his shrubberies, his drains, his new plans of farming; his well-arranged schools; his projected new church; the house too in point of size, situation, and climate, suited his fancy exactly; and he did not want a large or populous neighbourhood.

On the other hand, Littlemere was obviously too small for May, if she kept such an establishment as her fortune would allow. She [illegible]not like the situation; the property although

it would be eventually hers, as yet did not belong to her, and would not therefore exactly come up to the idea of having a house of her own.

So after much discussion, consideration, reflection, and vacillation, it ended in the Arnolds settling to rent Littlemere of Mr. Luttrell, whilst he was to remove with his niece to a house about ten miles off, but in a much prettier country; where she determined to reside for a time, until she had made up her mind about purchasing an estate of her own.

With money at command, there is never much trouble about doing the possible, indeed even the impossible can be carried into effect under the influence of gold; and May had an establishment ready formed from which to select that for her new abode, so there was no more delay in transferring servants, horses and carriages, than in despatching linen, plate, and china.

To do Mrs. Cameron justice, I must say that there was nothing of the extravagance of her London habits, in the domestic arrangements of her new residence, music and books

were her chief luxuries, in addition to her beautiful green-houses and flower-gardens; but then as she observed to her friend and counsellor, Mr. Arnold, the former were as healthy for the mind, as the latter were for the body; and if she had rather a large array of labourers and under-gardeners employed, she hoped there was nothing criminal in affording work to her poorer tenants. It was pleasanter to her, and less expensive on the whole, than the game-keepers, and huntsmen which her neighbours' birds and hounds required; and she fancied did at least as much good. Mr. Luttrell found nothing disagreeable in the change; the library of his new home if larger, was more comfortable, and the music-gallery had an organ; he was able to walk out whenever he pleased, as his windows opened to the ground, and May had given him a charming little pony phaeton to drive in, which suited him now rather better than the rough pony he used to ride. He observed that he always had liked May much better than Mrs. Arnold, who though very good and pleasant, had a way of being a little fussy, and thinking more of her husband than

anybody else; a remark which that husband, to whom Mr. Luttrell made it, bore with uncommon philosophy; perhaps because he considered it rather a eulogium on his wife, perhaps because he saw it was uttered in entire forgetfulness of his being the husband in question, and wisely reflected that where no offence was meant, no offence ought to be taken. It is just possible, indeed, that he might coincide with Mr. Luttrell in his opinion, and feel on the whole, that were he in that gentleman's place, he should certainly prefer the society of such a niece as May Cameron, to the company of the wife of another man, although that wife was Mrs. Arnold.

It was not to be supposed that the loss of her husband would cloud May's cheerfulness for ever, or produce permanent melancholy. She had valued him very highly, and loved him warmly; but it was not, it could not be, the love which accompanies a union of suitable years, tastes and habits. The scenes she had gone through, produced a deep and lasting effect on her character, but they neither entirely saddened her disposition, nor broke her

alike for her own improvement, and that of those who surrounded her. She had learned to see the real advantages, as well as the actual perils of her situation. She had learned to shun self-indulgence, and idleness, and to seek employment as the surest path to peace.

She endeavoured to understand the habits, the tastes, the wants, and the resources of her tenantry, and had the good sense to endeavour, so far as possible, to accommodate her remedies to their failings, and her improvements to their wants.

But in her zeal for the needy, and anxiety for the industrious, she did not forget herself; and whilst labouring to improve both their moral and physical condition, she neglected no efforts for her own mental culture. Consequently, she did not degenerate into a dull common-place country-lady, vegetating on merely like one of the geraniums in her own greenhouse, growing old without improvement; and after a brief period of gaudy brilliance, sinking into worthless torpidity, fit only to be put aside and forgotten.

With Wildey's eager plans regarding her, of

course he took a deep interest in her concerns, and especially in the way in which she chose to expend that portion of her ample fortune, which was entirely in her own control. This in his own imagination was already his; with this he was prepared at once to make an important figure in the world, this he had apportioned out in idea, to the several indulgences which were to repay him for his present season of endurance and mortification. It was, perhaps, no wonder then, that he should learn with annoyance, that May had found ways which he considered equally unnecessary and unjustifiable to expend this sum.

The excellent school to which she chose to send George Ashton, the money she expended in placing the youngest boy with a first-rate engraver, as he happened to have developed a considerable degree of ability for that art; and numerous smaller benefits which she bestowed so liberally on the other members of the family, did not probably make much difference in so large an amount, and would have been spared by him without much grumbling. But it was different when he came to hear of a new church

to be built, and endowed from her own resources; of the foundation of a school-house already laid, and plans for other objects, in his ideas equally preposterous.

If she took to disbursing such large sums where was such extravagance to stop; it was so completely throwing away money; no possible return could be made. Had she purchased diamonds or plate, he should not have objected; there would then have been something tangible in return for her gold, something which in itself was but another form of wealth. But her fancies were absurd and useless.

Such was his mental reasoning as he learned from Grace and her sisters all that Mrs. Cameron was doing in the country, and the information they gave made him eager to go down there himself, and judge of her pursuits on the spot.

This was very much increased as he became better acquainted with the names of her neighbours, and her companions. She went little into society, making her mourning an apology for avoiding parties of all kind; this was natural, and just what he could have wished;

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the wildest dissipation, once more fascinating circles of admiring spectators, and drawing after her crowds of devoted suitors, than know that she was exposed to the dangers of sympathy, advice, assistance, and encouragement from one individual, so gifted in attractions in himself, and so eminently favoured by his situation, which afforded all the advantages of seclusion and contrast, and the security of being unopposed by rivals.

Mrs. Dunsford, apparently had been very much pleased with everything she had seen and heard during her visit to May, and was as much inclined to talk about it as he could desire; important as it was to him to understand precisely how affairs had been going on, and what his future prospects were.

It had, in fact, been a very happy visit to both the ladies. Grace's own blooming cheeks, and light-hearted cheerfulness had done a world of good to her friend; good which was unmixed with envy, even when the lonely widow looked on the happy wife and proud mother, dancing her lively and flourishing infant.

It was such a delight to May to feel that

sunshine was once more round the house of those she truly loved, but whose path she had helped to darken; although she could not even then forgive herself for her former errors, she at least felt the satisfaction of having repaired them, to the fullest extent in her power.

"You deserve your happiness," said she to her friend as she one day gave back her baby to its mother's arms, "yes, Grace, you do deserve it, for you have placed your hopes properly. You fixed them on domestic ties, and home pleasures; I mean your worldly hopes, of course, for I well know you have other and higher aspirations; and you have realized them. I placed mine on wealth, and I, too, have gained it; but the result is as different, as the wisdom of our choice. Yours at least must satisfy your heart, and brings no heavy, trembling sense of responsibility with it."

"Indeed, but it does," replied Grace, warmly; "there is as much danger that the affections should too far engross the heart, as that the more worldly passions should. Every blessing brings its own trial with it; or rather, I may say, every possession is placed between a blessing

and a curse, and it is in our own power to secure the one, and to avoid the other."

"I suppose you are right, Grace, and do not fancy that I am discontented, or insensible to the immense advantages, which rightly used, my situation places in my power. Mine shall henceforth be a life of activity, proportioned to my former indolence; and striving for other's good, as different I trust as possible from the careless self-indulgence which once marked my conduct. I will have no other domestic ties, no nearer claims upon my time, my fortune, or my affections."

"Enthusiastic girl;" replied her friend, smiling. "Forgive me, May, but with your position, your personal beauty, your youth, and your strong feelings, it does seem to me a little premature to hear you vowing yourself to perpetual widowhood. Do you suppose none will seek you, none will love you, and try to win your love; and can you tell how hard it would be to reject the pleadings of some one who tells you his happiness is in your power? Do not make rash resolutions now, which may hereafter make you blush to change your mind!"

"My dear Grace, do you suppose I go about

declaring my resolution never to marry again, and proclaiming to all the world that I am occupied with the idea; you might know me better than that, I think. Except to you, I never said a word on the subject, and certainly have made no positive resolutions as you call them. It would be absurd; but I think and feel that I am better as I am. I know a little of the pleasures, the advantages, the perils, and the anxieties of matrimony, and I hardly think it could be ever worth a second trial. There are, I believe, women, who cannot live without some object of close and dear affection; women who must lean on some one; who cannot live on the memory of love alone, much less exist without it at all. I do not blame such; every one must decide for herself in such matters; and no one has a right to say that one or other is wrong, since no one can know the wants, the feelings, the heart of another. But I am not one of those, I can live without love; I can live alone; neither conjugal, nor maternal affection is necessary for my well-being; nay, I believe I am safer without them; if I loved at all, it would be too fully, too fondly, too passionately for happiness."

"Well, I do not know, I think you capable of

being an excellent wife, and mother; why not? It does not require one of set feelings to be a good wife, and quite another to be a good mistress, a good landlord, a good christian, May. I have heard women talk in that way, before; as if we could not do our duty to ourselves, our fellow-creatures, and our Creator, if we were likewise bound by domestic ties. If celibacy is in itself a good thing, it must be good for all, and then what would become of the world in general?"

"It is very natural for you, a wife, to argue in favour of matrimony, Grace, and we, I suppose, like most women, are rather led to our conclusions by our hearts than our heads. If a logician were to hear our conversation, he would probably find we had more right than reason in it; I know, I cannot argue; my ideas come too quick, and I dare say, as men say of us generally, I jump to conclusions by the aid of my feelings, instead of laboriously wading through difficult lines of logical reasoning, and all sorts of abstruse propositions."

"Very true, but, May, I incline to think that our feelings used as you intimate as a leaping-pole, carry us clearer, cleaner, quicker over miry doubts, and thorny difficulties, than those are

able to believe, who will sound every uncertain depth, or investigate every opposing rock and hedge with their own reasoning faculties. They oftener stick in the mud of indecision, or get awkwardly scratched by the sharp points of pride and prejudice, than we do, after all."

"True, perhaps!"

"Our discussion on the probabilities of your marriage, May, has led us into an abstruse metaphysical disquisition, not much connected with it."

"No wonder, the one is a subject on which I seldom cast a thought; the other, I mean woman's weakness and woman's strength of mind, is one, which of course occupies me much, since we must know our vulnerable points to defend them."

"Ah, there you have the advantage over me; you have so much more leisure to improve and educate your mind, you can devote hours to philosophy and science; whilst I, what with housekeeping, and baby, and Harry, my father, Ellen Hume, and the children, seldom find time to sit down to a book, and go sadly back in point of information and modern literature."

"Never mind, Grace; you were not made for

a philosopher, you were intended to be an exemplary wife, mother, and daughter; and high as the mental faculties range in the scale of merit, depend upon it, the moral ones are worth more. It is not the clever, the wise, the well-informed who are 'blessed'—it is the humble, the lowly, the peaceable. Happy Grace!"

"I hope you do not mean to imply, unhappy May."

"No, I am not unhappy, indeed—and now, once for all, I will just tell you my ideas about matrimony, and then we need never advert to the subject again. Marriage, in my case, seems too rash a speculation. A truer, kinder, fonder husband, than the one for whom I wear this crape, I could not have, and less than these qualities will not make me happy. Besides, what security could I have that I was loved—*portionless*, I might believe it; but the reputed mistress of a hundred thousand pounds, may I not suspect those who might court me of mercenary motives; would not the fear of such a suspicion serve to keep aloof all truly delicate and honourable minds? My wealth, Grace, raises a barrier round me, which I can never expect

true love to invade; and preserve me from encountering the evils without the good of matrimony. It would be madness to risk it, I am getting rid of my money as fast as I can, in a creditable way," added she, smiling, "and if I reduce my riches within moderate bounds, nobody, perhaps, may torment me for my hand. Thank Heaven, I shall sign away ten thousand pounds, to-morrow, as the endowment of my new church, and that will cost me in erecting, at least, six thousand more; and what with the school and other trifles of the sort, I shall have soon 'run through' twenty thousand of my burden; this helps to make me cheerful."

"How differently you talk now, from what you did when we first discussed marriage together."

"How differently, I think you might say. I had not then tried the experiment; and I had not then known Mr. Neville to teach me better things!"

CHAPTER IX.

CAMILLO. You are married?
FLORIZEL. We are not, Sir, nor are we like to be,
The stars, I see will kiss the valleys first.

WINTER'S TALE.

IMOGEN. Away, I do condemn mine ears that have
So long attended thee!

CYMBELINE.

MR. NEVILLE was the clergyman of whom James Wildey was so jealous; not without reason probably, although without foundation. Grace had been delighted with him, and she spoke of him with an enthusiasm which made Wildey miserable. He felt he must go down and judge for himself; recall old impressions, revive former affections, and in short, prevent May if possible, if not already too late, from

changing her mind. A visit to Holdenford must be effected, and he succeeded in procuring an invitation on the joint plea of wishing to see Mrs. Cameron and Arnold at the same time, on business, and meeting his sister. He was asked down to meet the Arnolds about the latter end of October, and with much anxiety, and many conflicting doubts, and fears, and hopes, he set out on his expedition.

As he passed through the beautiful woods surrounding the house, and glanced his eye down long vistas, opening upon park or green meadow, his eager desire to secure his cousin's affections became stronger than ever. He foresaw, in imagination, the time when he should be master of this or some such estate; he formed a clearer idea than he had before entertained of the importance of a country gentleman, a landed proprietor; he began to perceive that the man who in London is merely an undistinguished unit in a crowd, becomes a prominent and conspicuous person, when a resident landlord, and he determined on what his future course of life should be.

He found on approaching the house, his sister

and her hostess walking together on the lawn, examining the flower-garden, and feeding some pet pheasants. It was with considerable emotion that he joined them, and with intense anxiety that he watched the tone and manner of May's first greeting to him. It was calm, composed; not very kind, but sufficiently cordial to have left him nothing to complain of, had he possessed the good sense to remember the past, instead of merely dwelling on an imaginary future. He felt it almost cool, compared with what he had ventured to expect; but there was a something of emotion, which he either saw, or fancied in her eye, something which he flattered himself indicated latent feelings, which she did not care to expose to view.

He walked up and down with them a little while, admiring the prospect and the flowers, and conversing on such ordinary topics as were likely to suit all three at that time. His sister's presence was a great restraint on him; she added nothing to the stock of conversation, and she prevented its having the advantages of a *tête-à-tête*. He was compelled to be quiet, matter-of-fact, common-place, when he would

have been confidential, energetic, sentimental, or something of the sort; a mixture of all perhaps at once.

They had been strolling about in this way for nearly half-an-hour; May apparently bent on not understanding his wish to go a little farther, and answering all his hints as to exploring the grounds before dinner, by assertions that he should go all over them to-morrow, when they were joined by some others who were not at all welcome to him, and for whom he now concluded that his cousin had been waiting.

The new arrivals were Arnold and the clergyman, who came together down a little side-path, and advanced into the flower-garden with an air that seemed to speak one as much at home as the other. Even whilst shaking hands with his brother-in-law, Wildey found time to scan his supposed rival, and to observe that his manner of meeting and speaking to Mrs. Cameron, indicated that this was not the first interview on this day. Then he was introduced to Mr. Neville. It was a great satisfaction to him to discover that this gentleman was very plain, short, not very young, and decidedly very plain. This was his chief consolation for the disagree-

able necessity he was under of admitting that his countenance was both amiable and pleasant, his manners mild and gentlemanlike, and his conversation such as would have been delightful to most unprejudiced people. But to Wildey's feelings they were like the opposite poles of two magnets; and the very qualities which attracted most minds within the sphere of Mr. Neville's influence, were in themselves repulsive to the aspiring clerk.

He hated Mr. Neville because he was pleasing, well-bred, courteous, and kind; he hated him because he spoke in a tone of friendship to Mrs. Cameron; he hated him because he seemed to know which were her favourite flowers, and could observe how finely the young pheasants grew; he hated him in short, because he was her neighbour and saw her every day, or might do so if he pleased.

Arnold began talking eagerly to May about something which Wildey did not understand; sites for tenements, fall of ground, aspects, expenses, plans; something which seemed to interest all the party, and in the investigation of which, it appeared, the two gentlemen had been

recently engaged. This annoyed Wildey, and the notion that the clergyman knew more of May's affairs than he did himself, increased his hatred to him. And when Mr. Neville turned to him, and explained the subject that occupied them, on purpose that he who was a stranger might enter into the conversation, and take an interest in it—this considerate attention made him hate him still more. Not only because it proved Mr. Neville to be perfectly well-mannered, nor because it deprived Wildey of the right of feeling neglected, and excluded from conversation; but also, because he fancied it was a sort of triumph over him, a display of the superior knowledge which the clergyman enjoyed, and a proof of his interest with the lady herself.

The very topic too was odious; it was another outlay of money; it was a proposal to build comfortable tenements on the property where she was residing, as soon as she had completed the purchase of it. Wildey knew that negotiations for this object were going on, and since he had seen the place, he had no objection to the purchase, the grounds would suit him

very well, and judging from the outside of the house, there would be no fault to find with that. It was a handsome residence, suited to her fortune; or, if not quite large enough, it could be easily added to. Had that been what they were proposing, he should not have objected at all; but now when applied to for his opinion, not indeed by May, she did not do him that honour, but by Mr. Neville, he decidedly observed, that he should think Mrs. Cameron had better not be in a hurry; it was much easier to spend money, than to get it back again, and though of course he was no judge, he should at least recommend considerable deliberation, before investing so large a sum in a manner which might not be profitable after all.

Mrs. Cameron calmly observed, that had he seen as much as she had of the want of accommodation for the labouring classes, he would hardly doubt the profit and advantage of supplying them with better lodgings; and then she turned again to Mr. Arnold, and continued a topic which they had been discussing.

Wildey's ill-humour increased every moment, but he had tact enough to conceal it under a

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books. Wildey himself had one before him, as he sat at the table leaning his head on his hand, but his dark eyes seldom rested on the open page, they were mostly fixed on May, as she soon found out; fixed on her with a look, half reproach, half penitence, and only withdrawn after long intervals, whilst he abstractedly played with the pens, or seals, lying in the inkstand before him.

She was not looking at him, but she could see his reflection in a large glass close to her, and he sat so near the light, that she could distinctly remark his features, although her own face was completely in the shade, and she felt assured that he could not read her expression, or discover on what her eyes were fixed. She had not paid much attention to his looks at first, but now she was struck by the depression visible in his face, and recalling her own indifference of manner, and reflecting on his situation, his probable feeling of inferiority, and the fear which he might reasonably entertain of being a subject of contempt or dislike, it occurred to her, that she had not been quite courteous or kind enough to one, who had all the right to attention, which a subordinate station gives. Her dislike to him,

or rather her mingled fear and mistrust, made her the more desirous to be just, she was afraid she had unduly betrayed her private sentiments, and little as she was inclined to exert herself just then, she determined to make him the *amende honorable*.

Mrs. Arnold made the tea for her, to save her trouble on account of her head-ache, and her cousin bringing her the first cup, she desired him to sit down on a chair close to her, for she said she wanted to talk to him about the Dunsfords.

Wildey spoke with enthusiasm of their kindness, their hospitality, the delight he had in visiting them; always so ready to welcome him, always the same, cheerful, open-hearted; and it was so good of them too, he added, what claim had he—none, less than none, unless past unkindness deeply repented of, could constitute a claim. Harry received him as a brother, he added presently, after sitting in silence, with downcast eyes, and lips compressed, as if to confine his emotion; some minds were so constituted, that injuries seemed to attach them, noble, generous hearts, which nothing could chill; such conduct, such magnanimity was too

much to expect everywhere; there were those, who could not forget the past—who would not forgive indeed, whatever they professed in word—who never credited repentance and reformation, be they ever so sincere or long tried—who, on all occasions, thought only of the wrong, and would not let the culprit forget it either. Such kindness as Harry's confirmed all good resolutions, made sorrow ineffaceable, and penitence deeper every moment; but it was a pleasing sorrow, and a penitence which insured reformation. The taunting, reproachful, mistrusting kindness which some shewed, irritated, roused bad feelings, caused a renewed struggle with gentle emotions, and tended to throw the criminal, (as they evidently regarded one who had once been led astray,) to throw the criminal back on his old ways in self-defence.

May sipped her tea, and listened to his low earnest tones; she understood the insinuations, it was a reproach to herself; she thought perhaps not altogether an undeserved one, and she continued the conversation. He watched her closely, without seeming to observe her at all; he noticed the thoughtful way in which she played with her tea-spoon, and he felt convinced,

by the glance she gave, as she handed him the empty cup, that she understood his meaning. He carried the cup to the table, set it down, stood a moment as if in doubt, and then seated himself once more before his book. This time he kept his eyes upon the page, only at rare intervals glancing at her for a moment; he was in hopes she would make some further demonstration towards him, but he was disappointed. They had no more conversation that evening.

It was not likely, that with so many occupations, May would have much leisure to devote to gentlemen visitors of a morning; she met them at breakfast it was true, but during the interval between that and luncheon, she was to them invisible. Letters, household duties, and reading, audiences with steward, or tenants in distress, and a hundred such engagements, left her no time for dawdling over carpet-work or French novels, the common resources of languid country ladies, who even if they rise at more rational hours than the followers of London pleasures, often pass their lives in occupations little more improving or intellectual.

Wildey and his sister sat together in the drawing-room; the others were busy, or idle,

in the library. She inquired what he thought of their cousin, and he exclaimed that she was changed, sadly changed, towards him at least; grown haughty, cold, reserved. He had not thought such an alteration possible in so short a time.

Ann admitted that she was changed; it had struck her that she was graver, steadier, more rational than she used to be. She wondered James did not like the change; she thought it such an improvement.

Wildey exclaimed at the idea of improvement, and begged his sister, if she mentioned the subject to Mrs. Cameron at all, to say that he felt her manner to be so unkind, that he did not think he could bear it much longer, but should return home.

His sister stared at him with unmitigated surprise. She declared that she was not the least in the world likely to allude to the fact to May. She never found fault with her; she let her behave as she pleased; and if she thought it disagreeable, why she should just go into another room, or pretend not to hear, or at least not to mind; and she recommended

her brother to adopt the same course. What could it matter to him how Mrs. Cameron behaved, and whether she laughed or talked less than she did formerly? He had come down on business, had he not? and until that business was settled, it was very silly to talk of being offended and going away. Besides, she should have thought it would be much pleasanter for him at Holdenford than in the city, even if May did not speak once a week to anybody; and, moreover, he was dependent on her for his situation and advancement, and if he affronted her, he would be the loser; and after all, as he only arrived yesterday evening, and had not been yet twenty-four hours in the house, during six of which May had been suffering from a severe headache, it was quite foolish in him to decide whether it was pleasant or not; especially as he really must stay, talk as he would.

James very naturally replied to this long, luminous and logical *exposé* of the state of affairs, by an impatient "pho-pho;" and his sister, encouraged by such marks of attention, went on to say, that if it was rather stupid last night, he would find it pleasanter to-night,

probably, because she knew Mr. Neville was to dine there, and he was sure to make it agreeable —he talked so well, and was so cheerful and kind to everybody. James, not seeming to derive the degree of consolation from this announcement that his affectionate sister had expected, she was too much puzzled to comprehend the reason of his discomposure to be able to suggest anything more appropriate at the moment, and so continued silent.

He broke the silence himself, by abruptly inquiring of Ann whether she thought May would marry again.

She immediately and promptly replied, not until she had left off mourning for Mr. Cameron, which she supposed would be about two years. She thought that was the correct time, though some people only waited and mourned one year.

"But do you think she will then?" was his impatient question.

It was very likely indeed, Mrs. Arnold thought; and when her brother demanded her reason for thinking so, she answered, because most young widows did when they were pretty

and had large jointures; everybody always expected they would; and so, if anybody asked May—and Ann dared to say many would, probably, indeed, most likely, in fact, almost certainly—May would accept them, that is, if they were nice people, and she liked them well enough. She should not wonder if she were to marry a prince, or a lord, or a duke, so pretty and rich as she was.

James gathered from these two notions, first that his sister was a simpleton, and secondly that she knew nothing at all about the matter.

The first of these was by no means a novel idea, the second was a disappointment, on account of his previous expectations that Ann would have been able to give him some information.

What did Arnold think of it, was his next question.

Ann did not know; she had never heard him mention the subject at all; and so the topic was dropped, and Wildey sauntered out of doors to wile away the time till luncheon would bring some variety.

There was little comfort for him either in the

afternoon or evening of that day. May drove his sister out, and he was offered a horse as he did not shoot, and recommended to go with Arnold to see some famous view, or church, or ruin. What did he care for churches, either ruined or new; and as to views, his view of securing May's hand was the only thing he cared for.

He was obliged to go, however, and all the way Arnold entertained him with minute inquiries as to business-affairs and counting-house matters, and ended by telling him, when he saw how unwillingly he spoke on these subjects, that Mrs. Cameron had begged him to inquire the nature of the business which he wished to settle, and which had been the alleged object of this visit.

Wildey told him then, to tell his proud cousin that it was in compliance with her own directions that he had acted. The receipts of the house had been sufficient to pay off the debt due to Arnold; and as she had desired him to carry on the business, till that was accomplished, he was now prepared to deliver it up to her.

"Bah!" was Mr. Arnold's first ejaculation; and presently after he added the more intelligible assurance that he would speak to her about it, and they would come to some settlement before they parted, so meantime he might make merry if he pleased.

Wildey scornfully answered that merriment seemed banished from Mrs. Cameron's society, and that of her visitors; perhaps, however, she reserved it for Mr. Neville, to which insinuation he was gratified by hearing Arnold coolly answer, perhaps she did.

The evening was quite as bad, for the clergyman was there; and he not only was tortured by his agreeable conversation, but had the additional torment of hearing May play most exquisitely, and sing whatever he asked her. It was true she would have done as much for him, if Wildey would only have named a piece he preferred; but as he replied to all her offers by assertions that he knew the names of nothing now, she really could not oblige him in a similar way.

The next forenoon, as he was sauntering on the lawn, he was summoned by Mr. Arnold to

an interview with their hostess to arrange the matters which had been alluded to yesterday. He went with a palpitating heart, for much depended on this discussion. He had no idea what May was intending to do, and he hardly expected that she would immediately settle to marry him, even if she were only acting a part now, to try his patience and constancy, as he sometimes flattered himself.

He found her in the library; Mr. Luttrell, too, was there, and they proceeded at once to business. He proved to her that sufficient had been realized the last six months to more than cover the sum he owed to Mr. Arnold, but, added he, "it is your money, cousin, not mine; how then can I conscientiously apply it to my debts?"

"Because I chose to give it to you, James. I promised that the first six months' profit should be yours."

"No, I cannot accept it; I cannot stoop to a pecuniary obligation of the kind from one whose whole conduct denotes mistrust and suspicion. No! I have been wrong—guilty, very guilty; but I too have feelings of honour in my soul,

and I cannot to free myself from obligation to my brother-in-law, incur a still deeper one to—" He stopped, and fixed his eyes on hers with a look of proud humility.

"James," said she calmly, "I think these are unnecessary scruples, and indeed your whole tone and air imply a sense of more injury from me than I can quite understand. What harm I have done *you*, I do not know. But now listen and decide. I promised once, and I am sure you have not forgotten that, to make your fortune if in my power: events have given me the power, and though you released me from that promise, I still will act upon it. To you I make over the whole concern in the city; it is yours from this day; I have had the necessary papers prepared to certify the gift. One little counsel allow me to offer; by your own negligence and extravagance, you almost ruined a business, from which was made the ample fortune I now enjoy, let me advise you by perseverance in an opposite course of conduct, by trusting to industry and civility, by employing those who once helped to build it up, and by recalling such as you had once dismissed, to

make it again as flourishing as it was before. This is my advice, and now tell me, will you accept my gift?"

"And do you really mean to give me all?" said he, when he had recovered his surprise sufficiently to speak; "to make me master and head, where hitherto I have been only servant. And you do this for *me!* May, it is not possible."

"Take that paper," said May, "there is a deed of gift of capital enough to carry on the business, Mr. Arnold thought it was sufficient, but if not—"

"Noble, generous-hearted May," exclaimed he, "and I thought you cold and forgetful."

"You have made greater mistakes than that before now, James," replied May, with a slight smile. "But now call Mr. Arnold, we will settle this debt to him, and then your affairs stand clear."

Wildey obeyed.

Arnold came; he produced the bond which Wildey had given him for the money, cancelled it; took the cheque which May tendered to him for the amount, read it over deliberately,

and then coolly tearing it in little fragments, he said—

"There, now we are both free, James; you from your debt, and I from obligation. I would not take two thousand pounds from you, Mrs. Cameron, under any consideration short of saving one of our precious lives; so now you may build another school or two if you like;" and so saying he walked, whistling, out of the window again.

May laughed a little, and then turning to Wildey said, that as the money in question was all his, it was he who was really the gainer by Arnold's oddities. He remonstrated faintly, but she persisted, and so it was settled eventually, to the satisfaction of both.

Wildey's spirits improved after this transaction, and he was earnest and devoted in his endeavours to show his gratitude to his benefactress. Arnold looked coolly on; May noticed his scrutinizing eyes often fixed on her and her cousin, and wondered what he was thinking of. She was kind and cheerful with Wildey, and treated him with more familiarity than she had done before; he was evidently

flattered and pleased, and looked on her kindness as encouragement to his dearest hopes.

"Pray, Mrs. Cameron, allow me to ask what you intend to do next, for your cousin James?" So inquired Arnold, a night or two after this interview, when he and May were sitting together after the others were gone to bed.

May looked up from a note which she was sealing, and demanded what he meant. Arnold sitting with his feet on the fender, and his head thrown back against the easy-chair, was swinging a book in his hand, and speaking with his eyes shut, as if half asleep.

"Just what I say;" he replied quietly.

"Nothing! I think I have done enough, don't you?"

"Quite so—but I do not think he does."

"I know by your look that you mean something peculiar and deep, Mr. Arnold, you have been watching me these three days, what is it—pray speak?"

"My dear May, I am very fond of you."

"*Mille remercimens*—what comes next?"

"I should not like to see you throw yourself away."

"Well, of course not, but do you think I am in any danger?"

"On that good-for-nothing cousin of yours."

"My dear Mr. Arnold," exclaimed May in unfeigned surprise; and getting up she went round to his chair, and looking curiously in his face, inquired whether he was awake or asleep?

He opened his eyes, and assured her he was not dreaming, he only wished she might be as wide-awake as he was.

"You are the oddest compound of kindness and roughness, truth and mystery, trust and suspicion that I ever saw or knew," said she smilingly.

"I dare say I am not like your uncle, nor your late husband, and really I do not know that you are much acquainted with any one else, for as to James Wildey, you do not know *him* at all, I can tell you."

"Well, go on," continued she, standing quietly beside him, and looking graver than before, "I do not know him at all, what next?"

"You are very pretty, May, and very rich, and very generous; you have what everybody, every man, I mean, likes and values, and they will be ready enough to seek you; you will have plenty of admirers, some time or other."

"I dare say—but now?"

"You are very liberal!"

"Don't put me in a passion, Mr. Arnold, by going on in that way, tell me what you mean!"

"You have given a great deal to *one* already, May."

"Do you think I have given him too much?"

"No—yes—you have given him hopes, which I should be sorry to see realized, May."

"Hopes—of what nature?" said she, quickly, colouring deeply with a feeling of half-anger, half-alarm.

He took both her hands in his, and looking in her face, he said:

"Now, May, I am going to say what will make you, perhaps, my enemy for life; what will, possibly, put an abrupt and painful end to our intercourse. But I must risk it, at all

events, for were you my own daughter, you could hardly be dearer to me!"

She only looked at him fixedly in reply, and he went on.

"If you really intend to marry your cousin, when the proper time comes, you will never forgive me for what I now say; and you will tell him, and he will hate me more than he does now; his enmity would make little difference to me, but it would pain me much to lose your good-will. Judge, therefore, how dearly I value your happiness, when at such a risk, I still say, he is not worthy of you. If you marry him, you will repent it, once and for ever. He is still what he was; base, mercenary, treacherous, unprincipled, and if he cares for you at all, beyond your property, and I have often thought he did, it is an unholy passion, one which time, a very little time, will extinguish quite. Now are you angry or not?"

"I was in hopes," replied May, calmly, "that he was improved; I trusted that he had seriously resolved to reform, that his heart had been touched."

"And you meant to trust him? May, you do not, you cannot love him?"

"No, indeed; I never even fancied that I did; and as to marrying him! indeed, I don't think I could under any consideration."

"He thinks you will; he fancies the favours you have bestowed on him, are but a step to more and greater."

"Does he?" her eyes flashed proudly for a moment. "Then we must come to an understanding speedily; I have no wish to mislead him; he must learn that such hopes are without foundation; utterly groundless."

"And you are not offended with me?"

She smiled. "I am sure you are only making believe when you ask that; you know I could not really be angry at your kind anxiety. But I hope you believe me, when I assert that I have no intention of being James Wildey's wife; it is no affectation or coquetry which prompts me."

"Yes, I believe you, May; your looks confirm your words. I am glad you are not going to marry that scoundrel after all. Good night!"

And so saying, he got up and walked away, leaving May to decide on what her next step

should be. She meditated for some time; was it possible that her cousin had so entirely misunderstood her, and that he had ascribed to affection those demonstrations of good-will which she had only made to convince him of her forgiveness, and to render him easy under a sense of obligation. The efforts which she had made to conquer her repugnance must have been successful indeed, if he had been so totally wrong in his notions as to the origin of her actions. She was resolved that he should know it now; she would have no further deception; he should not again have to accuse her of coquetry or wilful vanity. She would rather err on the side of candour, and say more than was necessary, than too little.

She was not long in carrying out her resolution; indeed there was no time for delay, for it was Tuesday night, and James was to leave them quite early on Thursday; she saw him strolling about her flower-garden the next morning, and she went out, and joined him. He was exceedingly flattered by such a mark of attention, and her eyes being now open, she saw this in his manner of receiving her.

They conversed a little while about the flowers,

and presently he said, how long and deeply he should remember this visit, a visit fraught with so much that was of the intensest interest to him.

She replied very calmly, that she had no doubt he would; indeed she rather wished that he should not forget *all* that had passed.

"Forget, oh, impossible! the pleasureable emotions which I have experienced, forbid me to forget; my memory will be durable as my life."

"Well," she replied in a more careless way, "I am glad there is anything pleasureable to remember; I should have been grieved to think my house, and your visit here, were connected for life with painful ideas." He looked at her with an earnest expression in his dark eyes, which she could not mistake, though she did not wish to understand it; they spoke of love, triumphant, undoubting love; as if he felt sure of her affection, and had quite forgotten all personal demerit, all their former differences. She tried to be quite calm, and she went on gravely,

"We part to-morrow, James, perhaps for life!" He started violently, and changed colour;

"you cannot wonder that I should wish this—and you will not of course hesitate at compliance."

"Part for life!" repeated he, looking aghast; then recovering himself a little, he added, "May, you say this only to try me; you do not, you cannot mean it!"

"Why not? our connection is closed entirely; I have, I think, repaid you all obligations. I have certainly done all I could for you; and, permit me to say, there is too little pleasure connected with our past, to induce me to continue any intercourse."

"Impossible, May, I cannot submit to this; separation—no, never! my happiness, my reason, my life, depend upon seeing you."

"I trust you will find yourself mistaken; of my own intentions, *I* am quite sure; to-morrow we part, to meet no more, *purposely*, in this world."

"For heaven's sake, what have I done, what has happened within these few hours to change you so?"

"Nothing, I am not changed; I always intended this."

"Cruel—unfeeling—you know the misery you inflict; why heap benefits on me only to torment me thus?"

"I had no intention of tormenting you; I gave what I believed you valued most, riches and the power of acquiring more; beyond this, I have no more to do with you. Our paths in life must be as distinct, as our hearts and tempers are dissimilar."

"They are not dissimilar, May, I love you to desperation, and you know it."

"James, you insult the memory of your dead benefactor, when you use such words to me," replied May, drawing herself up with a proud and angry glance.

"Excuse my infatuation, the result of desperation; you compel me to speak, by your harshness."

"I hoped to have saved you for ever from the self-delusion which alone could prompt such a declaration. I hoped we should have parted without any additional ill-feelings between us, or any new source of irritation. Understand my motive for addressing you, and be silent in future."

"No, no, no," cried he passionately, "not while I have the opportunity of speaking; take back your gifts, May; or give me more, wealth brings me no happiness without your hand. I will not accept it. Prudery or propriety, or whatever you call it, may prevent your speaking *now;* but in time, you will, oh you surely will listen to me. Constancy shall win you—you know how constant I have been."

"You make me angry with your pertinacity; I do know your constancy, and I know more, I know your treachery, your dishonesty, your rapacity; and knowing these, think you it is prudery, which makes me speak now?"

He turned deadly pale.

"If you know this, capricious, cold-hearted girl, why wilfully mislead me once more? why bestow on me such princely gifts if you hated me with such deadly hatred?"

"I gave you what I did, because you injured me, James Wildey, and I would not leave an enemy in want, when I could relieve him. To shew that I forgave you, I made you rich; but because I understand you, I banish you my presence for ever."

"I will go to-day," said he sullenly.

"Do so, the carriage is at your disposal."

"I reject your gifts, Mrs. Cameron—I will take nothing from you, I will keep the privilege of hating you."

He looked desperately fierce as he said this.

"Do not decide in a hurry—you are of course at liberty to reject them, but I will not take you at your word now. A fortnight hence, you can signify through Mr. Arnold, whether you are still of the same mind."

He made no answer, but walked into the house. She sent him a message to inquire when he would have the carriage. In a quarter of an hour, was the reply. And he left Holdenford without seeing any of the party there again.

But he did not reject the offered wealth. His dreams of love were over, but riches still had attractions, and, as he hoped, compensations for him. He began to accumulate money, the passion has increased with time, and he is now in a way to be the wealthiest and most miserable

victim to a sordid love of gold the city can produce.

Whether May Cameron will keep ever of the same opinion, and continue a widow in spite of the solicitations of several suitors who are trying for her hand, may by some be considered doubtful. My readers may form their own conjectures, but if ever I hear of her second marriage, I will undertake to write the history of it also. Captain Valentine Mountsteven himself, who it was expected by many would have been amongst the number of her admirers, married another lady before Mrs. Cameron left off her widow's cap; and he and his wife are occasionally visitors at Holdenford.

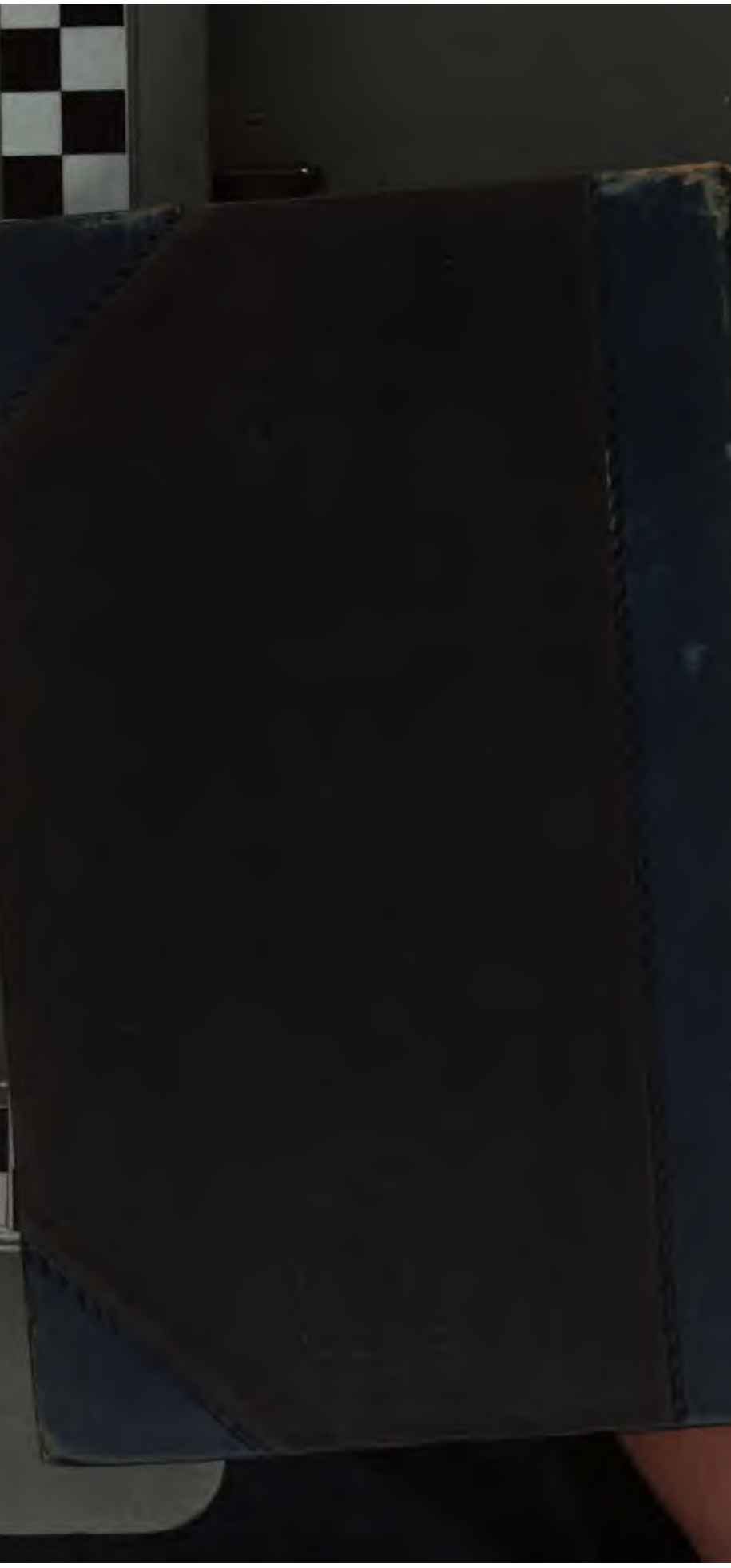
Hitherto, in the affections of Grace and her family, the care of her village and dependents, the education of the children, and the friendship of the rector, May has found sufficient pleasure in life to keep her cheerful, active, and contented, and my own conviction is, that whilst such is the case she cannot do better than continue in her present state.

Here then, I shall take leave of her in words addressed to her by Mr. Arnold, when speaking of her past life, whilst enjoyment was her object she failed even to find content, but since the duties of life have been her aim, she has realized happiness and peace of mind.

L'ENVOI.

Then in Life's goblet freely press
The leaves that give it bitterness,
Nor prize the coloured waters less,
For in thy darkness and distress
New light and strength they

And he who has not learned to know
How false its sparkling bubbles shew,
How bitter are the drops of woe,
With which its brim may overflow,
He has not learned to live.

LONGFELI

THE END.